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Charlotte L. Tilley







Ancestors

A Novel

By

Gertrude Atherton



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1907



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AMERICAN WIVES AND ENGLISH HUSBANDS
A WHIRL ASUNDER

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TO

Emma Beatrice Brunner





PART I

1904







ANCESTORS

I

MISS THANGUE, who had never seen her friend's hand tremble among the teacups before, felt an edge on her mental appetite, stimulating after two monotonous years abroad. It was several minutes, however, before she made any effort to relieve her curiosity, for of all her patron-friends Victoria Gwynne required the most delicate touch. Flora had learned to be audacious without taking a liberty, which, indeed, was one secret of her success; but although she prided herself upon her reading of this enigma, whom even the ancestral dames of Capheaton looked down upon inspectively, she was never quite sure of her ground. She particularly wished to avoid mistakes upon the renewal of an intimacy kept alive by a fitful correspondence during her sojourn on the Continent. Quite apart from self-interest, she liked no one as well, and her curiosity was tempered by a warm sympathy and a genuine interest. It was this capacity for friendship, and her unlimited good-nature, that had saved her, penniless as she was, from the ignominious footing of the social parasite. The daughter of a clergyman in a Yorkshire

village, and the playmate in childhood of the little girls of the castle near by, she had realized early in life that although pretty and well-bred, she was yet not sufficiently dowered by either nature or fortune to hope for a brilliant marriage; and she detested poverty. Upon her father's death she must earn her bread, and, reasoning that self-support was merely the marketing of one's essential commodity, and as her plump and indolent body was disinclined to privations of any sort, she elected the rôle of useful friend to fashionable and luxurious women. It was not an exalted niche to fill in life, but at least she had learned to fill it to perfection, and her ambitions were modest. Moreover, a certain integrity of character and girlish enthusiasm had saved her from the more corrosive properties of her anomalous position, and she was not only clever enough to be frankly useful without servility, but she had become so indispensable to certain of her friends, that although still blooming in her early forties, she would no more have deserted them for a mere husband than she would have renounced her comfortable and varied existence for the no less varied uncertainties of matrimony.

It was not often that a kindly fate had overlooked her for so long a period as two years, and when she had accepted the invitation of one of the old castle playmates to visit her in Florence, it had been with a lively anticipation that made dismay the more poignant in the face of hypochondria. Nevertheless, realizing her debt to this first of her patrons, and with much of her old affection revived, she wandered from one capital and specialist to the next, until death gave her liberty. She was not unrewarded, but the legacy inspired her with no

desire for an establishment beyond her room at the Club in Dover Street, the companionship of friends not too exacting, the agreeable sense of indispensableness, and a certain splendor of environment which gave a warmth and color to life; and which she could not have commanded had she set up in middle years as an independent spinster of limited income. She had received many impatient letters while abroad, to which she had replied with fluent affection and picturesque gossip, never losing touch for a moment. When release came she had hastened home to book herself for the house-parties, and with Victoria Gwynne, although one of the least opulent of her friends, first on the list. She had had several correspondents as ardent as herself, and there was little gossip of the more intimate sort that had not reached her sooner or later, but she found subtle changes in Victoria for which she could not as yet account. She had now been at Capheaton and alone with her friend for three days, but there had been a stress of duties for both, and the hostess had never been more silent. To-day, as she seemed even less inclined to conversation, although manifestly nervous, Miss Thangue merely drank her tea with an air of being too comfortable and happy in England and Capheaton for intellectual effort, and patiently waited for a cue or an inspiration. But although she too kept silence, memory and imagination held rendezvous in her circumspect brain, and she stole more than one furtive glance at her companion.

Lady Victoria Gwynne, one of the tallest women of her time and still one of the handsomest, had been extolled all her life for that fusion of the romantic and the aristocratic ideals that so rarely find each other in the same shell; and

loved by a few. Her round slender figure, supple with exercise and ignorant of disease, her black hair and eyes, the utter absence of color in her smooth Orientally white skin, the mouth, full at the middle and curving sharply upward at the corners, and the irregular yet delicate nose that seemed presented as an afterthought to save that brilliant and subtle face from classic severity, made her look — for the most part — as if fashioned for the picture-gallery or the poem, rather than for the commonplaces of life. Always one of those Englishwomen that let their energy be felt rather than expressed, for she made no effort in conversation whatever, her once mobile face had of late years, without aging, composed itself into a sort of illuminated mask. As far as possible removed from that other ideal, the British Matron, and still suggesting an untamed something in the complex centres of her character, she yet looked so aloof, so monumental, that she had recently been painted by a great artist for a world exhibition, as an illustration of what centuries of breeding and selection had done for the noblewomen of England.

Some years before, a subtle Frenchman had expressed her in such a fashion that while many vowed he had given to the world an epitome of romantic youth, others remarked cynically that his handsome subject looked as if about to seat herself on the corner of the table and smoke a cigarette. The American artist, although habitually cruel to his patrons, had, after triumphantly transferring the type to the canvas, drawn to the surface only so much of the soul of the woman as all that ran might admire. If there was a hint of bitterness in the lower part of the face, from the eyes there looked an indomitable courage and much sweetness. Only in the carriage of the head,

the tilt of the chin, was the insolence expressed that had made her many enemies. Some of the wildest stories of the past thirty years had been current about her, and rejected or believed according to the mental habit or personal bias of those that tinker with reputations. The late Queen, it was well known, had detested her, and made no secret of her resentment that through the short-sighted loyalty of one of the first members of her Household, the dangerous creature had been named after her. But whatever her secrets, open scandal Lady Victoria had avoided: imperturbably, without even an additional shade of insolence, never apologizing nor explaining; wherein, no doubt, lay one secret of her strength. And then her eminently respectable husband, Arthur Gwynne, second son of the Marquess of Strathland and Zeal, had always fondly alluded to her as "The Missus," and lauded her as a repository of all the unfashionable virtues. To-day, presiding at the tea-table in her son's country-house, an eager light in her eyes, she looked like neither of her portraits: more nearly approached, perhaps, poor Arthur Gwynne's ideal of her; not in the least the frozen stoic of the past three days. When she finally made an uncontrollable movement that half-overturned the cream-jug, Flora Thangue's curiosity overcame her, and she murmured, tentatively:

"If I had ever seen you nervous before, Vicky—"

"I am not nervous, but allowances are to be made for maternal anxiety."

"Oh!" Miss Thangue drew a deep breath. She continued, vaguely, "Oh, the maternal rôle—"

"Have I ever failed as a mother?" asked Lady Victoria, dispassionately.

"No, but you are so many other things, too. Somehow, when I am away from you I see you in almost every other capacity."

"Jack is thirty and I am forty-nine."

"*You* look thirty," replied Flora, with equal candor.

"I am thankful that my age is in Lodge; I can never be tempted to enroll myself with the millions that were married when just sixteen."

"Oh, you never could make a fool of yourself," murmured her friend. Then, as Victoria showed signs of relapsing into silence, she plunged in recklessly; "Jack is bound to be elected. When has he ever failed to get what he wanted? But you, Vicky dear—is there anything wrong? You had a bulky letter from California the day I arrived. I do hope that tiresome property is not giving you trouble. What a pity it is such a long way off."

"The San Francisco lease runs out shortly. Half of that, and the southern ranch, are my only independent sources of income. The northern ranch belongs to Jack. All three are getting less and less easy to let in their entirety, my agents write me, and I feel half a pauper already."

"This is not so bad," murmured Flora.

"Strathland would bundle me out in ten minutes if anything happened to Jack."

"It would be a pity; it suits you." She was not referring to the hall, which was somewhat too light and small for the heroic mould of its chatelaine, but to the noble proportions of the old house itself, and the treasures that had accumulated since the first foundations were laid in the reign of Henry VI. There were rooms hung with ugly brocades and velvets never duplicated, state bed-

chambers and boudoirs sacred to the memory of personages whose dust lay half-forgotten in their marbles; but above all, Capheaton was famous for its pictures. Not only was there an unusually large number of portraits by masters scattered about the twenty rooms that lay behind and on either side of the hall, but many hundreds of those portraits and landscapes from the brushes of artists fashionable in their day, unknown in the annals of art, but seeming to emit a faint scent of lavender and rose leaves from the walls of England's old manor-houses and castles. In the dining-room there was a full-length portrait of Mary Tudor, black but for the yellow face and hands and ruff; and another, the scarlet coat and robust complexion still fresh, of the fourth George, handsome, gay, devil-may-care; both painted to commemorate visits to Capheaton, historically hospitable in the past. But Lord Strathland, besides having been presented with six daughters and an heir as extravagant as tradition demanded, was poor as peers go, and had more than once succumbed to the titillating delights of speculation, less cheering in the retrospect. Having a still larger estate to keep up, he had been glad to lend Capheaton to his second son, who, being an excellent manager and assisted by his wife's income, had lived very comfortably upon its yield. Upon his death Elton Gwynne had assumed possession as a matter of course; and a handsome allowance from his doting grandfather supplementing his inheritance, the mind of the haughty and promising young gentleman was free of sordid anxieties.

Lady Victoria's satirical gaze swept the simpering portraits of her son's great-aunts and grandmothers, with which the hall was promiscuously hung.

"Of course I am as English as if the strain had never been crossed, if you mean that. But I'd rather like to get away for a while. I really ought to visit my California estates, and I have always wanted to see that part of America. I started for it once, but never even reached the western boundaries of New York. One of us should spend a year there, at least; and of course it is out of the question for Jack to leave England again."

"You would not spend six months out of Curzon Street. You are the most confirmed Londoner I know."

"Do you think so?"

Miss Thangue replied, impulsively, "I have often wondered if you numbered satiety among your complexities!"

This was as far as she had ever adventured into the mysterious backwaters of Victoria's soul, and she dropped her eyelids lest a deprecating glance meet the contempt it deserved; both with a due regard for the limit imposed by good taste, despised the faint heart.

"I hate the sight of London!" Her tone had changed so suddenly that Flora winked. "If it were not for Jack I would leave—get out. I am sick of the whole game."

"Oh, be on your guard," cried her friend, sharply. "That sort of thing means the end of youth."

"Youth after fifty depends upon your doctor, your masseuse, and your dressmaker. I do not say that my present state of mind is sown with evergreens and immortelles, but the fact remains that for the present I have come to the end of myself and am interested in no one on earth but Jack."

Miss Thangue stared into her teacup, recalling the gossip of a year ago, although she had given it little heed

at the time: Victoria had been transiently interested so often! But all the world knew that when Arthur Gwynne was killed Sir Cadge Vanneck had been off his head about Victoria; and that when obvious restrictions vanished into the family vault he had left abruptly for Rhodesia to develop his mines, and had not found time to return since. Sir Cadge was about the same age as the famous beauty, and rose quite two inches above her lofty head. People had grown accustomed to the fine appearance they made when together—"Artie" was ruddy and stout—and although Victoria reinforced her enemies, for Vanneck was one of the most agreeable and accomplished men in London, the artistic sense of that lenient world was tickled at their congruities and took their future mating for granted; Arthur Gwynne was sure to meet his death on the hunting-field, for he was far too heavy for a horse and rode vilely. When he fulfilled his destiny and Vanneck fled, the world was as much annoyed as amused. But they were amused, and Flora Thangue knew that this gall must have bitten deeper than the loss of Vanneck, who may or may not have made an impression on this woman too proud and too spoiled to accept homage in public otherwise than passively, whatever may have been the unwritten tale of her secret hours. The excuses hazarded by Vanneck's friends were neither humorous nor sentimental, but no one denied that they were eminently sensible: his first wife had died childless, his estates were large, his title was one of the oldest in England. But although no one pitied Victoria Gwynne, many were annoyed at having their mental attitude disarranged, and this no doubt had kept the gossip alive and been a constant source of irritation to a woman whose sense of humor was as deep as her pride.

Flora replied at random. "Jack couldn't very well get on without you."

His mother's eyes flashed. "I flatter myself he could not—at present. If Julia Kaye would only marry him!"

"She won't," cried Flora, relieved at the change of tone. "And why do you wish it? She is two years older, of quite dreadful origin—and—well—I don't like her; perhaps my opinion is a little biased."

"She is immensely rich, one of the ablest political women in London, and Jack is desperately in love with her."

"I cannot picture Jack in extremities about any one, although I don't deny that he has his sentimental seizures. He even made love to me when he was cutting his teeth. But he doesn't need a lot of money, you rank higher than she among the political women, and—well, I believe her to be bad-tempered, and more selfish than any woman I have ever known."

"He loves her. He wants her. He would dominate any woman he married. He is such a dear that no woman who lived with him could help loving him. Moreover, she is inordinately ambitious, and Jack's career is the most promising in England."

"Jack is far too good for her, and I am glad that he will not get her. I happen to know that she has made up her mind to marry Lord Brathland."

"Bratty is a donkey."

"She would be the last to deny it, but he is certain to be a duke if he lives, and she would marry a man that had to be led round with a string for the sake of being called 'your grace' by the servants. She'll never be anything but a third-rate duchess, and people that tolerate her now

will snub her the moment she gives herself airs. But I suppose she thinks a duchess is a duchess."

"Money goes pretty far with us," said Lady Victoria, dryly.

"Doesn't it? Nevertheless—you know it as well as I do—among the people that really count other things go further, and duchesses have been put in their place before this—you have done it yourself. Julia Kaye has kept her head so far because she has been hunting for strawberry leaves, and there is no denying she's clever; but once she is in the upper air—well, I have seen her as rude as she dares be, and if she became a duchess she would cultivate rudeness as part of the rôle."

"We can be rude enough."

"Yes, and know how to be. A parvenu never does."

"She is astonishingly clever."

"Duchesses are born—even the American ones. Julia Kaye has never succeeded in being quite natural; she has always the effect of rehearsing the part of the great lady for amateur theatricals. Poor Gussy Kaye might have coached her better. The moment she mounts she'll become wholly artificial, she'll patronize, she'll give herself no end of ridiculous airs; she won't move without sending a paragraph to the *Morning Post*. The back of her head will be quite in line with her charming little bust, and I for one shall walk round and laugh in her face. She is the only person that could inspire me to such a vicious speech, but I am human, and as she so ingenuously snubs me as a person of no consequence, my undazzled eyes see her as she is."

Lady Victoria, instead of responding with the faint, absent, somewhat irritating smile which she commonly

vouchsafed those that sought to amuse her, lit another cigarette and leaned back among the cushions of the sofa behind the tea-table. She drew her eyelids together, a rare sign of perturbation. The only stigma of time on her face was a certain sharpness of outline and leanness of throat. But the throat was always covered, and her wardrobe reflected the most fleeting of the fashions, assuring her position as a contemporary, if driving her dressmaker to the verge of bankruptcy. When her bright, black, often laughing eyes were in play she passed with the casual public, and abroad, as a woman of thirty, but with her lids down the sharpness of the lower part of the face arrested the lover of detail.

"Are you sure of that?" she asked, in a moment.

"Quite."

"I am sorry. It will be a great blow to Jack. I hoped she would come round in time."

"She will marry Brathland. I saw Cecilia Spence in town. She was at Maundrell Abbey with them both last week. You may expect the announcement any day—she'll write it herself for the *Morning Post*. How on earth can Jack find time to think about women with the immense amount of work he gets through?—and his really immodest ambitions! By-the-way—isn't this polling-day? I wonder if he has won his seat? But as I said just now I do not associate Jack with defeat. His trifling set-backs have merely served to throw his manifest destiny into higher relief."

"The telegram should have come an hour ago. I have few doubts—and yet he has so many enemies. I wonder if we shall be born into a world, after we have been sufficiently chastened here, where one can get one's head

above the multitude without rousing some of the most hideous qualities in human nature? It is a great responsibility! But there has been no such speaker, nor fighter, for a quarter of a century." Her eyes glowed again. "And heaven knows I have worked for him."

"What a pity he is not a Tory! He could have a dozen boroughs for the asking. I wish he were. The whole Liberal party makes me sick. And it is against every tradition of his family—"

"As if that mattered. Besides, he is a born fighter. He'd hate anything he could have for the asking. And he's far too modern, too progressive, for the Conservative party—even if there were anything but blue-mould left in it."

"Well, you know I am not original, and my poor old dad brought us up on the soundest Tory principles; he never would even compromise on the word Conservative. But considering that Jack is as Liberal as if the taint were in the marrow of his bones, what a blessing that poor Artie did not happen to be the oldest son. Cecilia says they were all talking of it at Maundrell Abbey, where of course it is a peculiarly interesting topic. That ornamental and conscientious peer, Lord Barnstable, has never ceased to regret his father's death, for reasons far removed from sentimental. He told Cecilia that Lord Strathland almost confessed to him that he would give his right eye to hand over his old shoes to Jack, not only because he detests Zeal, but because it would take the backbone out of his Liberalism—"

"And ruin *his* career. Thank heaven Zeal is engaged at last. They will marry in the spring, and then the only cloud on Jack's horizon will vanish."

"What if there were no children?"

"There are so much more often than not—that is the least of my worries. He had five girls by his first wife; there is no reason why this splendid cow I have picked out should not produce a dozen boys. I never worked so hard over one of Jack's elections—not only to overcome Zeal's misogyny, which he calls scruples, but I had to fight Strathland every inch of the way. When I think of Jack's desperation if he were pitchforked up into the Peers—you do not know him as I do."

"Well, he is safe for a time, I fancy. There has been consumption in the family before, and always the slowest sort—"

A footman entered with a yellow envelope on a tray.

Lady Victoria opened it without haste or change of color.

"Jack is returned," she said.

"How jolly," replied the other, with equal indifference.

II

"YOU look tired—I will take you up to your room. Vicky has so many on her hands."

The American rose slowly, but with a flash of gratitude in her eyes.

"I am tired, and I don't know a soul here. I almost wish Lady Victoria had not asked me down, although I have wanted all my life to visit one of the ancestral homes of England."

"Oh, you'll get over that, and used to us," said Miss Thangue, smiling. "Your staircase is behind this door, and we can slip out without attracting attention. They are all gabbling over Jack's election."

She opened a door in a corner of the hall where the newly arrived guests were gathered about Lady Victoria's tea-table, and led the way up a wide dark and slippery stair. After the first landing the light was stronger, and the walls were, to an inch, covered with portraits and landscapes, the effect almost as careless as if the big open space were a lumber-room.

"Are they *all* old masters?" asked Miss Isabel Otis, politely, her eyes roving over the dark canvases.

"Oh no; the masters are down-stairs. I'll show them to you to-morrow. These are not bad, though."

"What a lot of ancestors to have!"

"Oh, you'll find them all over the house. These are

not Gwynnes. This house came to Lord Strathland through the female line. It will be Jack's eventually—one way or another; and Jack must be more like the Eltons than the Gwynnes—unless, indeed, he is like his American ancestors." She turned her soft non-committal eyes on the stranger. "You are his thirty-first cousin, are you not?"

"Not quite so remote. But why do you call him Jack? He is known to fame as Elton Gwynne."

"His name is John Elton Cecil Gwynne. We are given to the nickname these days—to the abbreviation in general."

They were walking down a corridor, and Miss Thangue was peering through her lorgnette at the cards on the doors.

"I know you are on this side. I wrote your name myself. But exactly where—ah, here it is."

She opened the door of a square room with large roses on the white wall-paper, and fine old mahogany furniture. The sofa and chairs and windows were covered with a chintz in harmony with the walls. "It is cheerful, don't you think so?" asked Miss Thangue, drawing one of the straight curtains aside. "Vicky had all the rooms done over, and I chose the designs. She is quite intolerantly modern, and holds that when wall-paper and chintz can save an old house from looking like a sarcophagus, why not have them? That bell-cord connects with your maid's room—"

"I have no maid. I am not well off at all. I wonder Lady Victoria thought it worth while to ask me down."

"Dear me, how odd! May I sit with you a little while? I never before saw a poor American girl."

"I'll be only too grateful if you will stay with me as long as you can. I am not exactly poor. I have a ranch near Rosewater, some property and an old house in San Francisco. All that makes me comfortable, but no more; and there are so many terribly rich American girls!"

"There are, indeed!" Miss Thangue sat forward with the frank curiosity of the Englishwoman when inspecting a foreign specimen. But her curiosity was kindly, for she was still a girl at heart, interested in other girls. Miss Otis, looking at her blond, virginal face, took for granted that she was under thirty, and owed her weight to a fondness for sweets and sauces.

"How can you travel in Europe if you are not rich?" demanded Flora. "I never dare venture over except as the guest of some more fortunate friend."

"Are *you* poor?" asked Miss Otis, her eye arrested by the smart little afternoon frock of lace and chiffon and crêpe-de-chine.

"Oh, horribly. But then we all are, over here. If it were not for the Jews and the Americans we'd have to make our own clothes. The dressmakers never could afford to give us credit."

"They all looked very wealthy down-stairs."

"Smart, rather. This happens to be a set that knows how to dress. Many don't. You know something of it yourself," she added, with a frank survey of the girl's well-cut travelling-frock and small hat. "Lots of Americans don't, if you don't mind my saying so—for all their reputation. I went to a dinner at an American Legation once and two of your countrywomen came with their hats on. They had brought letters to the Minister, and he

hadn't taken the precaution of looking them over. He was terribly mortified, poor thing."

She related the anecdote with philanthropic intention, but Miss Otis put her half-rejected doubts to flight by remarking, lightly:

"We don't do that even in Rosewater."

"Where *is* Rosewater? What a jolly name!"

"It is in northern California, not far from Lady Victoria's ranch and what is left of ours. I have spent most of my life in or near it—my father was a lawyer."

"Do tell me about yourself!" Like most amiable spinsters, she was as interested in the suggestive stranger as in a new novel. She sank with a sigh of comfort into the depths of the chair. "May I smoke? Are you shocked?"

Then she colored apprehensively, fearing that her doubt might be construed as an insult to Rosewater.

But Miss Otis met it with her first smile. "Oh no," she replied. "Will you give me one? Mine are in my trunk and they haven't brought it up." She took a cigarette from the gayly tendered case and smoked for a few moments in silence.

"I don't know why you should be interested in my history," she said at last in her slow cold voice, so strikingly devoid of the national animation. "It has been far too uneventful. I have an adopted sister, six years older than myself, who married twelve years ago. Her husband is an artist in San Francisco, rather a genius, so they are always poor. My mother died when I was little. After my sister married I took care of my father until I was twenty-one, when he died—four years ago. There are very good schools in Rosewater, particularly the High

School. My father also taught me languages. He had a very fine library. But I do not believe this interests you. Doubtless you want to know something of the life with which Lady Victoria is so remotely connected."

"I am far more interested in you. Tell me whichever you like first. How *are* you related, by-the-way?"

"Father used to draw our family tree whenever he had bronchitis in winter. One of the most famous of the Spanish Californians was Don José Argüello. We are descended from one of his sons, who had a ranch of a hundred thousand acres in the south. When the Americans came, long after, they robbed the Californians shamefully, but fortunately the son of the Argüello that owned the ranch at the time married an American girl whose father bought up the mortgages. He left the property to his only grandchild, a girl, who married my great-grandfather, James Otis—a northern rancher, born in Boston, and descended from old Sam Adams. He had two children, a boy and a girl, who inherited the northern and southern ranches in equal shares. The girl came over to England to visit an aunt who lived here, was presented at court, and straightway married a lord."

"Then you are second cousin to Vicky and third to Jack. I had no idea the relationship was so close."

"It has seemed very remote to me ever since I laid eyes on Lady Victoria down-stairs. Father made me promise, just before he died, that if ever I visited Europe I would look her up. Somehow I hadn't thought of her except as Elton Gwynne's mother, so I wrote to her without a qualm. But I see that she is an individual."

"Rather! How self-contained our great London is, after all! Vicky has been a beauty for over thirty years—

to be sure her fame was at its height before you were old enough to be interested in such things. But I should have thought your father—"

"He must have known all about her. It comes back to me that he was very proud of the connection for more than family reasons, but it made no impression on me at the time."

"Proud?"

"Yes, he was rather a snob. He was very clever, but he fell out of things, and being able to dwell on his English and Spanish connections meant a good deal to him. I can recite the family history backwards."

"But if he was clever, why on earth did he live in Rosewater? Surely he could have practised in San Francisco?"

"He drank. When a man drinks he doesn't care much where he lives. My father had fads but no ambition."

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Miss Thangue, aghast at this toneless frankness. "You must have been glad to be rid of him!"

"I was fond of him, but his death was a great relief. He was a hard steady secret drinker. I nursed him through several attacks of delirium tremens, and was always in fear that he would get out and disgrace us. Sometimes he did, although when I saw the worst coming I generally managed to get him over to the ranch. Of course it tied me down. I rarely even visited my sister. My father hated San Francisco. He had practised there in his youth, promised great things, had plenty of money. The time came—" She shrugged her shoulders, although without the slightest change of expression. "I never lived my own life until he died, but I have lived it ever since."

"And the first thing you did with your liberty was to

come to Europe," said Miss Thangue, with a sympathetic smile.

"Of course. My father and uncle had got rid of most of their property long before they died; there isn't an acre left of our share in the southern estate. But my uncle died six years ago and willed me all that remained of the northern, as well as some land in the poorer quarter of San Francisco. I could not touch the principal during the lifetime of my father, but we lived on the ranch and I managed it and was entitled, by the terms of the will, to what I could make it yield. When I was finally mistress of my fortunes I left it in charge of an old servant, sold enough to pay off the mortgage on a property in San Francisco I inherited from my mother, and came to Europe with a personally conducted tour."

Miss Thangue shuddered. The phrase unrolled a vista of commonness and attrition. Miss Otis continued, calmly: "That is the way I should feel now. But it was my only chance then; or rather I had seen enough of business to avoid making mistakes when I could. In that way I learned the ropes. After we had been rushed about for six weeks and I could not have told you whether the Pitti Palace was in Italy or France, and the celebrated frescos were one vast pink smudge, the party returned and I wandered on by myself. I spent a winter in Paris, and months in Brittany, Austria, Italy, Spain—Munich." It was here that her even tones left their register for a second. "I studied the languages, the literatures, the peoples, music, pictures. In Munich"—this time Flora's alert ear detected no vibration—"and also in Rome, I saw something of society. It was a life full of freedom, and I shall never cease to be grateful for it, but I must go home soon

and look after my affairs. I left England to the last, like the best things of the banquet. I hope Lady Victoria—I shall never be able to call her Cousin Victoria, as I remember father did—will be nice to me. I have seen a good deal of life, but have never had a real *girl's* time, and I should love it. Besides, I have a lot of new frocks."

"I am sure Vicky will be nice to you. If she isn't, I'll find some one that will be. You might marry Jack if you had money enough. We are dying to get him married—and a California cousin—it would be too romantic. And you would hold your own anywhere!"

But Miss Otis expanded a fine nostril. "I have no desire to marry. I feel as if I had had enough of men to last until I am forty—what with those I have buried, and others I have known at home and in Europe—to say nothing of the executors of my uncle's will, who did not approve of my coming abroad alone and delayed the settlement of the estate as long as possible. And now I have had too much liberty! Besides, I have seen 'Jack's' picture—two years ago, in a magazine. I will confess I had some romantic notions about him: imagined him very dashing, bold, handsome; insolent, if you like—the traditional young aristocrat, glorified by genius. He looks like Uncle Hiram."

"Is that who Jack looks like? We never could make out. No, Jack is not much to look at, except when he wakes up—I have seen him quite transfigured on the platform. But he is as insolent as you could wish, and has a superb confidence in himself that his enemies call by the most offensive names. But he is a dear, in spite of all, and I quite adore him."

"Perhaps; but life, myself, so many mysteries and

problems, upon which I have barely turned a dark lantern as yet, interest me far more than any man could, unless he were superlative. I have had my disillusions."

She lit another cigarette, and for a few moments looked silently out of the window at the darkening woods beyond the lawn. Flora Thangue regarded her with a swelling interest. It was a type of which she had no knowledge, evidently not a common type even in the hypothetical land of the free; she had visited New York and Newport and known many Americans. True, she had never met the provincial type before, but she doubted if Rosewater had produced a crop of Isabel Otises. What was at the source of that cold-blooded frankness, so different from the English fashion of alternately speaking out and knowing nothing? Was she merely an egoist—it ran in the family—or did it conceal much that she had no intention of revealing? Her very beauty was of a type rarely seen in the America of to-day, prevalent as it may have been a hundred years ago: she looked like a feminine edition of the first group of American statesmen—although black Spanish hair was pulled carelessly over the high forehead, a heavy coil encircling the head in a long upward sweep, and the half-dreaming, half-penetrating regard of the light-blue eyes was softened by a heavy growth of lash. The eyebrows were low and thick, the upper lip was sensitive, quivering sometimes as she talked, but the lower was firm and full. It was the brow, the profile, the strength of character expressed, the general seriousness of the fine face and head, that made her look like a reversion to the type that gave birth to a nation. But Miss Thangue had seen too much of the world to judge any one by his inherited shell. She had observed many

Americans with fine heads and bulging brows concealing practically nothing, insignificant German heads whose intellects had terrified her, the romantic Spanish eyes of the most unromantic people in Europe, English pride and an icy mask of breeding guarding from the casual eye the most lawless and ribald instincts. Therefore had she no intention of taking this new specimen on trust, much as she liked her, and she speculated upon her possibilities in the friendly silence that had fallen between them. Life is composed of individuals and their choruses, and Flora, humorously admitting the fact, was far more interested in others than in herself.

Only in the dense silky masses of her black hair and the almost stolid absence of gesture did the American betray her Spanish ancestry; but how much of the Spaniard, subtle, patient, vengeful, treacherous, mighty in passive resistance and cunning, lay behind those deep fearless blue eyes of her New England ancestors? Or was she not Spanish at all, but merely a higher type of American—or wholly herself? Would Jack, susceptible and passionate, a worshipper of beauty down among the roots of his abnormal cleverness and egoism, fall in love with her? And what then? The girl, with her strong stern profile against the shadows, her low brooding brows, might wield a power far more dangerous than that of the average fascinating woman, if her will marshalled the rest of her faculties and drove them in a straight line; although the luminous skin as polished as ivory, the low full curves and slow graceful movements of her figure added a potency that Flora, always an amused observer of men, would have been the last to ignore. Victoria, high-bred, fastidious, mocking, yet unmistakably passionate and

possibly insurgent, was of that mint of woman about whom men had gone mad since the world began. But this girl, who might be as cold as the moon, or not, looked, in any case, capable of clasping a man's throat with her strong little hand, and gently turning his head from east to west. At this point Miss Thangue rose impatiently and rang a bell. Jack's career was almost at the flood. No woman could submerge his intellect and stupendous interests for more than a moment.

"Order lights and have your trunks brought up," she said. "I will send one of the housemaids to help you dress. My room is over on the other side of the house—go through that door opposite, and down a corridor until you come to another long hall and staircase like the one on this side. You will find my name on the door. Knock at about a quarter-past eight and I will go down with you. Vicky may be in an angelic humor and she may not. It depends mainly upon whether Jack condescends to turn up. I suppose you know all about him; it would hardly do for you to face him and his mother if you didn't. He has travelled quite exhaustively in the colonies and given us some of the most informing literature on that subject that we have. He was out in Africa when the Boer War broke out, and once before in India, when there was fighting, volunteered both times and did brilliant service. He has no end of medals with clasps. Then he suddenly went in for politics and announced himself an uncompromising Liberal. It nearly killed his grandfather—Lord Strathland—for Jack is the one person on earth that he loves as much as himself; and it has alienated many of his relatives on both sides—which gave him one more chance to win against terrific odds; he enjoys that sort of

thing. He had been in but two years when there was a general election, and he has only just got back—he contested three divisions before he won his seat this time, and he had almost as hard a fight before. Vicky, who hates the Gwynnes, with the exception of Lord Zeal, the heir, besides believing in Jack as you would in Solomon, has steadily upheld him; and she is a powerful ally—not only one of the most distinguished of the political women, but still turns heads when she chooses, and her game is generally in the cabinet preserves, when it is not in the diplomatic. I must run. Put on your most fetching gown. Julia Kaye, a detestable little parvenu, is here. Jack is in love with her and she has chosen another. It will be a cousinly duty to console him. Then you can turn him over to some one else. Ta, ta!" Her last words floated back from the depths of the corridor; a clock was striking and she had pattered off hastily.



III

THE "Jack," whose more distinguished patronymic was so gayly caracolling down the road to posterity, had arrived, and after dressing hastily, sought his mother. Her hair was done, her gown laced; she dismissed her maid at once, and while her eyes melted, in the fashion of mothers, she embraced her son with something more than maternal warmth: a curious suggestion of relief, of stepping out of her own personality and leaving it like a heap of clothes on the floor. This attitude had occasionally puzzled her idol, but he was too masculine to analyze. She was his best friend and a delightful person to have for a mother; her soul might be her own possession undisturbed. He admired her almost as much as he did himself, and to-night he kissed her fondly and told her gallantly that she was looking even more beautiful than usual.

"It is all this white after the dead black," said Lady Victoria, smiling appreciatively. "I am thankful that prolonged mourning is out of date; it made a fright of me and was getting on my nerves." She wore no jewels save a high diamond dog-collar and a few sparkling combs in her hair, but she made a superb appearance with the long white sweep of shoulders and bust, her brilliant eyes and smart tailed gown of black chiffon and Irish lace. Her arms, no longer rounded as when artists had fought

to paint her, were but half-revealed under floating sleeves, and her fair tapering hands were even younger than her face.

She opened a large black fan and moved it slowly while looking intently at her son's bent profile. "Something has gone wrong," she said. "Have you seen Julia Kaye again?"

"No, I was invited to Maundrell Abbey last week, but couldn't manage it, of course. And I knew she was to be here. Nothing has gone wrong—but I had rather a shock this morning. I met Zeal at the club. He looks like a death's head. He vowed he was taking even better care of himself than usual, but his chest is bad again. He talked about going to Davos—the very word makes me sick! In the next breath he said he might go out to Africa. Can't you hurry on his marriage?—persuade Carry that it is her duty to go with him?"

"I should have no difficulty persuading Carry. The rub is with him. Compulsory asceticism has bred misogyny, and misogyny scruples. He says that he has sins enough to his account without laying up a reckoning with posterity. If it were not for you I should agree with him. I feel like a conspirator—"

"There is no reason why his children should be consumptive. Carry's physique is Wagnerian, and she is just the woman to look after her children herself. Zeal's health was thrown to the dogs by a weak indulgent frivolous mother, and what she left him he disposed of later when he made as great an ass of himself as might have been expected. He is a hypochondriac now and would keep a close watch on his heir's health and habits; you may be sure of that. He ought not to be in London

now—it is stifling—went up for some business meeting or other—seemed to wish to avoid details. I hope to heaven he has not been relieving the monotony of his life by some rotten speculation. I begged him to come down here, but he wouldn't—says that his hand is no longer steady enough to hold a gun—it's awful!—worse because I'm not merely fond of him and regretting the possible loss of a good friend—I have felt like a beast all day. But I can't help it. For God's sake write and persuade him to go to Davos at once—and picture the delights of a pretty and devoted nurse. I feel as if I had ashes in my mouth—and yesterday I was so happy!" he burst out, with the petulance of a child.

"I will write to-night," she said, soothingly. "He has a very slow form of consumption; I have the assurance of his doctors. And at least he has committed himself with Carry, and announced his intention to marry as soon as a sojourn somewhere has made him feel fit again. You know how much better he always is when he comes back. Put it out of your mind to-night. I want you to be as happy as I am. Everybody is talking of the brilliance of your campaign—"

"Much good brilliance will do me if I am to rot in the Upper House!"

"Put it out of your mind; don't let apprehension control you for a moment. Believe me, will-power counts in life for more than everything else combined, and if it isn't watched it weakens."

"All right, mummy. You are never so original as when you preach. So Julia Kaye came down this afternoon? Talk about will. Mine should be of pure steel: I have ordered her out of my consciousness these last

weeks at the point of the bayonet. She has written me exactly three times. However—those letters were charming," he added, with the sudden smile that transfigured his face, routing the overbearing and contemptuous expression that had won him so many enemies; friends and flatterers and the happy circumstances of his life had combined thoroughly to spoil him. "Do you maintain that will can win a woman?" he added, sharply.

She was the woman to laugh outright at such a suggestion. "No, nor that it can uproot love, although it can give it a good shaking and lock it in the dark room. I doubt if you love Julia Kaye, but you will find that out for yourself. You might bring her to terms by flirting a little with your American cousin—"

"My what?" He opened his eyes as widely as he had ever done when a school-boy.

"Of course—I forgot you know nothing of her. She wrote me from Ambleside—I infer she has been 'doing' England; and as her credentials were unimpeachable I asked her down. She has inherited a part of the northern estate and was brought up in the neighboring town of Rosewater—the American names are too silly. She seems quite *comme il faut* and is remarkably handsome. I detest Americans, as you know, but there certainly is something in blood. I liked her at once. She looks clever, and is quite off the type—none of the usual fluff. If she doesn't bore me I shall keep her here for a while."

"I wish you would adopt her," he said, fondly. "I shouldn't be jealous, for I hate to think of you so much alone." He rose and kissed her lightly on the forehead, experience teaching him to avoid a stray hair from the carefully built coiffure. "I'll see if I can waylay Julia on

the stairs; she is always late. Keep from eleven to twelve for me to-morrow morning. I want to tell you about the campaign. It was a glorious fight!" His eyes sparkled at the memory of it. "I felt as if every bit of me had never been alive at once before. My opponent was a splendid chap. It meant something to beat him. The other side was in a rage!—more than once yelled for half an hour after I took the platform. When I finished they yelled again for half an hour—to a different tune." His slight, thin, rather graceless figure seemed suddenly to expand, even to grow taller. Some hidden magnetism burst from him like an aura, and his cold pasty face and light gray eyes flamed into positive beauty. "It was glorious! Glorious! I was intoxicated—I could have reeled, little as they suspected it. I wouldn't part for a second with the certainty that I am the biggest figure in young England today. I hate to sleep and forget it. If I cultivated modesty I should renounce one of the exquisite pleasures of life. Humility is a superstition. The man who doesn't weed it out is an ass. To be young, well-born, with money enough, a brain instead of a mere intelligence, an essential leader of men—Good God! Good God!" Then he subsided and blushed, jerked up his shoulders and laughed. "Well—I never let myself go to any one but you," he said. "And I won't inflict *you* any longer."

IV

"I WISH the old homes of England had electric lights," thought Miss Otis, with a sigh.

There were four candles on the dressing-table, two on the mantel-shelf; beyond the radius of their light the room was barely visible. She carried one of the candles over to the cheval-glass and held it above her head, close to her face, low on either side.

"I feel as if I had been put together by some unpleasant mechanical process. It is well I am not inordinately vain, but when one puts on a new dress for the first time—" She shrugged her shoulders hopelessly, replaced the candle, and walked up and down the room swinging the train—her first—of the charming gown of pale blue satin; patting the hair coiled softly about the entire head in a line eminently becoming to the profile, and prolonged by several little curls escaping to the neck.

She felt happy and excited, her fine almost severe face far more girlishly alive than when she had told her story, provocatively dry, to Flora Thangue. She directed an approving glance at the high heels of her slippers, which, with her lofty carriage, produced the effect of non-existing inches. She was barely five feet five, but she ranked with tall women, her height as unchallenged as the chiselling of her profile.

"What frauds we all are!" she thought, with a humor of

which she had not vouchsafed Miss Thangue a hint. "But what is a cunningly made slipper on a foot not so small, at the end of a body not quite long enough, but an encouraging example of the triumph of art over nature? Not the superiority, perhaps, but they are the best of working partners."

She sat down and recalled the conversation with her new friend, giving an amused little shudder. She had heard much of, and in her travels come into contact with, the cold-blooded frankness of the English elect; with whom it was either an instinct or a pose to manifest their careless sense of impregnability. When pressed to give an account of herself the dramatic possibilities of the method suddenly appealed to her, accompanied by a mischievous desire to outdo them at their own game and observe the effect. She had found herself as absorbed as an actress in a new and congenial rôle.

"After all," she thought, "clever women make themselves over in great part, uprooting here, adopting there, and as we have so little chance to *be* anything, there is a good deal to be got out of it. If one cannot be a genius one can at least be an artist. I have never had much cause to be as direct as stage lightning, but as I enjoyed it I suppose I may infer that even brutal frankness is not foreign to my nature. Perhaps, like father, I am a snob at heart and liked the sensation of a sort of artistic alliance with the British aristocracy. Well, if I develop snobbery I can root out that weed—or persuade myself that some other motive is at the base of a disposition to adopt any of the characteristics of this people: a woman can persuade herself of any sophistry she chooses. Not for anything would I be a man. Absolutely to accept the facts of life,

even the ugly unvarnished fact itself, and at the same time to invent one's own soul-tunes—that is to be a woman and free!"

A printed square of card-board on her writing-table had informed her that the dinner-hour was half-past eight. She looked at her watch. It was five minutes to the time. Once more she peered into the glass, shook out her skirts, then sought a door in a far and dusky corner. It opened upon a long dimly lit corridor which led into another at right angles, and Isabel presently found herself at the head of a staircase similar to the one on her side of the house. Here, too, the walls were hung with portraits and landscapes, and as far down as the eye could follow; but after glancing over them for a moment with the recurring weariness of one who has seen too many pictures in the hard ways of European travel, her eyes lit and lingered on the figure of a young man who stood on the landing, his back to her, examining, with a certain tensity, a canvas on a level with his eyes.

"Uncle Hiram—John Elton Cecil Gwynne! What a likeness and what a difference!"

The young Englishman's hair, pale in color and very smooth, was worn longer than the fashion, the ends lilting. As he turned slowly at the rustle of descending skirts, this eccentricity and his colorless skin made him look the pale student rather than the gallant soldier, the best fighter on the hustings that England had seen for five-and-twenty years. As Isabel walked carefully down the slippery stair she veiled her eyes to hide the wonder in them. She had expected personality, magnetism, as a compensation for nature's external economies. His apparent lack of both made him almost repellent, awakened in Isabel a

sensation of antagonism; and the cool speculation in his light gray eyes merely accentuated his general dearth of charm. True he had height—although his carriage was unimposing—his head was large and well-proportioned, his nose and chin salient, but the straight heavy mouth was as contemptuous as a Prussian officer's, and in spite of his grooming he looked old-fashioned, absurdly like the Uncle Hiram who had been a country lawyer and farmer, and had always worn broadcloth in the hottest weather—except, to be sure, when he wore a linen "duster," or sat on the veranda in his shirt-sleeves, his feet on the railing.

However, she smiled, and he smiled politely in return, advancing a few steps to meet her. "I hope you have heard of me," she said. "Your mother is so busy—English people are so indifferent to details—I am your cousin, Isabel Otis—"

"Of course my mother has spoken of you. I am very glad to see you in my house," he added, hospitably. "Shall I show you the way?"

He made no further remark as they descended the darker section of the stair, and she could think of nothing to say to him. Nor did she particularly care to think of anything, the American in her resenting his lack of effort. But as they reached the door she paused abruptly.

"I forgot! Miss Thangue asked me to knock at her door—"

"You take us too seriously," he said, with a slight sneer. "Flora has evidently forgotten you; she came down a quarter of an hour ago."

Isabel lifted her head still higher, annoyed at the angry blood that leaped to her face. "I am afraid I am rather literal," she said, with more hauteur than the occasion

demanded. "But perhaps you will tell me where to go. There seems to be a bewildering number of rooms. After three years of lodgings in Europe, to say nothing of the modest architecture of Rosewater, I feel as if astray in a maze."

"You got that off as if you were a masquerading princess," he said, with a flicker of humor in his eyes. "Americans generally bluff the other way." He opened the door. "We meet here in the hall. There is my mother. You are not obliged to speak to her, you know. We are less formal in life than in novels." With this parting shot he left her abruptly and joined a small dark woman with a plebeian face, a sensual mouth, and magnificent black eyes.

"The rude beast!—Julia Kaye, of course." But Isabel forgot them both in the novelty of the scene. The square white hall was lit with wax-candles and shaded lamps, and filled with the murmur of voices—beautiful gowns—the sparkle of jewels. Isabel dismissed the memory of early trials, the long years she had lived in the last three, her philosophic resignation to the disillusions and disappointments with which her liberty had been pitted; it was her first appearance in the world of fashion—which she entered, after all, by a sort of divine right. Trepidation was undeveloped in her, and when she had stood for a moment, quite aware that her proud and singular beauty had won her instant recognition, she walked over to her hostess.

No fresh demand was made on her courage. Lady Victoria's earlier mood of colossal indifference had been dissipated by her son's return. She greeted Isabel with a dazzling smile and a winning gesture.

"Isn't Jack a darling? Isn't he a dear?" she commanded. "I have put you on his left, that you may be sure not to be bored. What hair! That is *your* legacy from Spain. I have the eyes, but I never had a foot of hair. I hope you are comfortable. I expect you to remain a week. I am so glad that Jack will be here. The place is intolerably dull without him."

Isabel, warming to such maternal ardor in a beauty whose years were prematurely emphasized by a son as conspicuous as Elton Gwynne, summoned a few vague words of enthusiasm. She was reproached politely for wandering about England for two months before discovering herself to her relatives; then, Lady Victoria's interest waning, she turned to a young man, handsome and Saxon and orthodox, and said, casually, "Jimmy, you will take in Miss Otis."

Dinner had already been announced. The twain, in complete ignorance of each other's identity, walked through a long line of rooms, almost unfurnished but for the scowling or smiling dead crowding the walls. Isabel decided that she would be as effortless as the English and see what came of it. The practised instinct of the American girl, added to the excessive hospitality of the Californian, would have led her to put her companion immediately at ease, but not only was she fond of experimenting with racial characteristics upon her own hidden possibilities, but she was intensely proud, and the English attitude had stung her more than once.

"Why should I please them?" she thought, contemptuously. "Let them please me."

Her companion betrayed no eagerness to please her; and during the first ten minutes at table he talked to

Gwynne about the late elections. Evidently, he too had emerged from the political fray triumphant. Isabel sat like a stately picture by Reynolds, and after her slow gaze had travelled over the dark full-length portraits of the kings and queens that had honored Capheaton, it dropped to the more animated faces in the foreground. The men were good-looking, with hardly an exception; judging by their carriage they might all have been army men, but as every word that floated to the head of the table was political, they possibly had followed their successful host's example and adopted an equally intermittent career. One or two of the women were almost as handsome as Lady Victoria, with their superb figures, their complexions of claret and snow, that blending of high breeding and warm palpitating humanity one never sees outside of England. But others within Isabel's range were too haggard for beauty, although one had a Burne-Jones face and her eyes gazed beyond the company with an expression that made her seem pure spirit; but she too looked tired, delicate, curiously overworked.

Opposite Isabel was a tall buxom young woman of the purest Saxon type, who was talking amiably with the man on her right, and occasionally shaking with deep and silent laughter; her intimate casual manner, her slight movements, her accentuation, manifestly bred in the bone. Suddenly it was borne in upon Isabel's always sensitive consciousness that she was the only haughty and reserved person present, and she felt provincial and laughed frankly at herself. The lady across the table claiming the attention of the host, she turned to her own partner. Her black eyelashes were long, and under their protecting shadow she swept a glance at the card above the young

man's plate. It was inscribed, "Lord Hexam." She saw her opportunity and asked, ingenuously:

"How can you be a member of the House of Commons?"

He looked up from his fish and replied, somewhat cuttingly, "By contesting a borough and getting elected."

"But I thought a peer could not be in the House of Commons."

"He can't."

"Then how can you be?"

"I am not a peer." He looked very much annoyed.

"But you are Lord Hexam."

He answered, sulkily: "I happen to be the son of a peer."

"Are you irritated because I know nothing about you?" asked Isabel, cruelly. "Do you suppose I have wasted my time in England reading Burke?"

"No, there are too many sights," he replied, more cruelly still.

"They are far more interesting than most of the people I have met." Then she changed her tactics and smiled upon him; and when she smiled she showed a dimple hardly larger than a pin's head at one corner of her flexible mouth. For the first time he looked under her eyelashes into the odd blue eyes, with their dilated pupils and black rim edging the light iris. He suddenly realized that she was beautiful, in spite of the three little black moles on her face—he detested moles—and smiled in return.

"I am afraid I was rude. But I am really shy, and you quite took it out of me. I am more afraid of the American girl than of anything on earth."

"How did you know I was an American?"

"By your accent." He laughed good-naturedly. "Now I am even with you."

"Well, you are. Californians pride themselves upon having no accent."

"Oh, it is not nearly so bad as some. But it is there all the same. Not a twang nor a drawl, but—well—every country has its unmistakable stamp."

"Well, I have no desire to be taken for anything but an American," she said, defiantly. "A Californian, that is. After all, we are quite different. But we do have an appalling variety of accents in the United States. I have lived abroad long enough to discover that. When I am an old maid I am going to mount the platform and preach the training of the voice in childhood. I have taken a violent dislike to more than one clever American man merely because he trailed his voice through his nose. I don't mind our vices being criticised as much as our crudities."

"I never before heard an American girl make a remark that indicated the least interest in her country—even when—pardon me—they brag. They generally give the impression that they don't even know who happens to be the President of the moment. Somehow, you look as if you might."

"I was brought up by a man, and my uncle was a great politician in a small way. That is to say he was identified with country politics only, but he and my father were everlastingly discussing the national issues. Of course you have only met girls from the great cities, where the men are too busy making money to take any interest in public affairs. The women rarely hear them mentioned, practically forget there are such affairs—except on the Fourth of July, which they resent as a personal grievance. I have met scores of them in Europe. To know

anything of politics they regard as the height of bad form."

"Sometimes I wish that our women would let them alone for a while. That is my sister over there," indicating the lady with the Burne-Jones face. "She has worn herself to a shadow working for her husband, who is in the House, and she is heart and soul in politics—which she regards as a sort of divine mission. She is on several committees, is far more useful to her husband than his secretary, for she has the gift of style—and no one would accuse Rex of that—and during an election she never rests. Besides which, of course she has her little family, the usual number of establishments to look after, and great social pressure. I always maintain that our women are of immense service to us, but many of them are physically unfit. I expect to see my sister go to pieces any day, and as she is little short of an angel it worries me."

"She does look angelic," said Isabel, sympathetically. "Is that what is the matter with the rest of them?—the thin ones, I mean?"

"Generally speaking. The thinnest is my cousin. I went in for a cup of tea a week or two before the end of last session. There were several of us about the tea-table when a footman entered and muttered something to her, and with a vague word of apology she left the room and did not return for half an hour. I thought the baby must be dying, and was about to ring, when she reappeared and remarked that she had been sitting at the telephone listening to a paper her husband had just finished on one of the questions before the House. Some of them stand it better." He indicated a fair beautiful creature with a determined profile and deep womanly figure. "There is Mrs. Sefton,

for instance. She presides at committee meetings—she is great on colonial politics—for three or four hours at a time, and always sails out as fresh as a rose; but she has buried her husband and entertains when and whom she chooses. Lady Cecilia opposite understands politics as well as any woman in England, but does not go in for them—Spence isn't in the House; that may account for it!"

"Your fashionable women do not in the least resemble ours," said Isabel, meditatively. "They are far more like the women of our small towns."

"What!"

"It sounds paradoxical, but it is more than half true. Say two-thirds; the other third is all in favor of your women, for obvious reasons. But those I speak of, the best women of every small town, are constantly active in civic affairs. Most of the sanitary improvements and the educational, all schemes for parks and better streets, come from them. There is no village too small to have its 'Woman's Improvement Club.' And it is the women that have saved all the historical buildings in the country from destruction."

"I thought they went in for Browning Societies."

"Doubtless you would scorn really to know anything of American humor. Perhaps our comic papers have never heard of the Improvement Clubs, or find nothing in them that is humorous. Not that I would decry the Browning Clubs, nor any literary clubs, however crude. It is all in the line of progress. 'Culture' is a tempting morsel for the jokemaker, but as an alternative for dull domesticity and the vulgar inanities of gossip it is not to be despised."

"By Jove, you are right," said Hexam, not without warmth.

"Is my fair cousin converting you to something?" asked the host. His voice had been little heard, and he looked sulky.

"Cousin?"

"Yes, he is my cousin," said Isabel, with the accent of resignation. Hexam laughed. Gwynne looked as if the grace of humor had been left out of him. Isabel, innocent and impassive, turned her eyelashes upon her partner. "I was quite wild to meet my cousin," she went on, in the toneless voice that contrasted so effectively with her occasional extravagance of speech; "and now I find him the precise image of my uncle Hiram, who never spoke to me except to say: 'Little girls should be seen and not heard,' or 'Run off to bed now, little one.'"

Without repitching her voice she yet infused it with a patronizing masculinity that once more startled Hexam into laughter, and caused a silent convulsion in the massive frame of Lady Cecilia Spence.

"She knows that was a bit of vengeance," thought Isabel. "But of course, manlike, he'll never suspect it." She turned her deep thoughtful gaze full upon her cousin. His eyes were glittering under their heavy lids. He replied, suavely:

"I hope you will find us more polite—if less picturesque. I cannot flatter myself that my likeness to your uncle Hiram extends that far. 'Precise image'—is not that perhaps a bit of national exaggeration?"

"Well, I take that back," said Isabel, sweetly. "But you really might be his son instead of his second cousin."

"Perhaps that accounts for a good many things," said

Lady Cecilia. "You know, Jack, I have always said there was something exotic about you. You are much too energetic and progressive for this settled old country. If you had been born in America I suppose you would have been president at the earliest moment the constitution permitted."

He hesitated a moment, then delivered himself of a bombshell. "I was born in America," he said.

His eyes moved slowly from one stupefied face to another. "As I left at the age of five weeks I can hardly claim that the incident left an indelible impress. But the fact remains that I should be eligible for the presidency if I chose to become an American citizen."

Isabel looked at her relative with an accession of interest; he had suddenly ceased to be an alien, become in a measure a personal possession. "Come over and try it," she said, impulsively. "*There* is a career worth while! A young country as full of promise as of faults! Think of the variousness of achievement! England's history is made. If you are all they claim, you might really make history in the United States. If I only had a brother—" Her eyes were flashing for the first time. "However—they say you love the fight. It is far more difficult to become a president of the United States than a prime-minister of England, for with us family influence counts for nothing."

"I am afraid I have not the qualities that do count. To be as frank as yourself—I don't think I could stand your politics."

"But think of the excitement of really sounding your capacities!" Impersonality was an achievement with Isabel and she could always command it. "You can never do that here, no matter how brilliant your success. There

must always be the question of how far you would have gone without your family, and friends of equal power. The ugliest lesson of life is its snobbishness. Even when the herd can expect no return, a blind instinct—doubtless an inheritance from the days when there were but two classes—drives it to beat the drums for the socially elect. We have enough of that in America, heaven knows, but the best thing that can be said of American politics is that they are free of it. Besides, if our politics are bad, so much the better for you. You might do for the United States what your English great-grandfather helped to do for this country in 1832. You might be another 'Great Revolutioner,' like your still more illustrious ancestor, Sam Adams. You'll never, never have such an opportunity to become a great historical figure over here, for English dissatisfaction hardly counts, and in the United States there are increasing millions that demand reform, a closer approach to the ideal republic promised by their ancestors, and the man for the hour."

The angry glitter had left his eyes and he was looking at her with interest and curiosity. He respected her courage and obvious power to rise above the personal attitude of her sex.

"I dislike intensely many things in your country," he said, slowly; "but I will confess that it interests me greatly. If it has failed in some of its original ideals it has at least continued to be a republic for more than a century; and when one considers its enormous size and conflicting elements—for I suppose you will not claim that you are a homogeneous race—that is very inspiring! It makes one believe that fundamentally the country must be sound—that unswerving fidelity to an ideal. It is a great thing!

a stupendous thing! I wish I knew that I should live to see England, all Europe, a republic. There is no other state fit for self-respecting men—that voice in the selection of their own rulers."

"By Jove, Jack!" cried Lord Hexam. "I never heard you go as far as that before."

"Possibly you never will again. I have no desire to rank with those brilliant failures that are born before their time, and no intention of wasting my energies on the unattainable. Moreover, radicals and socialists per se are merely a nuisance. The Liberal party is the only choice in England to-day, and when I get it at my back, I can, at least, after I have led it to a stronger position, fight for the soundest of the extremist dogmas, as well as for the reorganization of the House of Peers. Hereditary legislation in the twentieth century and the most civilized country in the world! Why not an hereditary army and navy? Russia has few greater anachronisms. And when one thinks of the careers it has ruined! Look at Barnstaple."

The two men plunged into discussion, and Isabel, her eyes expressing a polite interest, studied the face of her cousin. She appreciated for the first time something of its power. A brief illumination of his eyes had betrayed the soul of the idealist; a passion that in a less sound mind might result in fanaticism. He was talking with none of the fiery enthusiasm that made him so irresistible a public speaker, but his negative suggestion of vitality, of mature thought, his very lack of every-day magnetism, fascinated her; not the woman, but the acute, receptive, and antagonistic intelligence. As he sat there talking, with hardly a change of expression in his voice or on his cold face,

faintly sneering, he seemed to be holding his powers in solution; to have resolved them for the time being into their elements, that they might rest and recuperate. While no doubt in first-rate physical condition, he looked as if he had not a red corpuscle in his body, and this very contrast to the warm full-blooded people surrounding him gave him a distinction of his own, the distinction of pure brain independent of those auxiliaries that few public men have been able to dispense with. It was obvious that he was too self-centred, too haughtily indifferent, or too spoilt, to make any effort in private life to charm or bewilder; when he vanquished from the platform it was by the awakened rush of the forces within him; and this very indifference, this contemptuous knowledge of his mighty reserves, this serene faith in his star, invested his personal unattractiveness with a formidable significance. Isabel's imagination dilated him into a disembodied intellect surrounded by mere statues of human flesh. As she left the dining-room the illusion vanished. She liked him less than ever, nevertheless wished that he were her brother and the rising star in American politics.

V

AS the women entered a large room on the opposite side of the central hall, where coffee was to be served, Flora Thangue laid her hand deprecatingly on Isabel's arm. "I was so sorry not to be able to wait for you," she said. "But I had a distracted note from Vicky at eight asking me to dress as quickly as I could and see if the cards on the table were all right: the new butler is rather a muff, and such a martinet the footmen dare not interfere. I was delighted to see that Jack had taken charge of you. What do you think of our infant prodigy?"

"I have had little chance to think anything," said Isabel, evasively. "Is he the typical Englishman—I mean apart from his peculiar gifts?"

"Only in certain qualities. You see he has Celtic blood in him: of course the Gwynnes had their origin in Wales; and then he is one-fourth American, isn't he? I can't say how far that inheritance has influenced his character, but there is no doubt about the Celtic. Outwardly he is even more impassive than the usual Oxford product, and if he had been born a generation earlier he would have had all sorts of affectations. But affectation, thank heaven, is out of date. We wouldn't tolerate a Grandcourt five minutes. Whom should you like to talk to? You will have enough of me."

"I am sure there is no one I shall like half so well," said Isabel, truthfully; and Flora loved her for not being gracious. "I think I should like to know Mrs. Kaye."

"If you ever do, please give me the benefit of your investigations. There are as many opinions of her as there are of cats. Vicky believes in her and I don't. Jack is in love with her—with certain of his Celtic instincts gone wrong."

She led Isabel over to Mrs. Kaye, who sat alone on a small sofa, sipping her coffee and absently puffing at a cigarette. She was exquisitely dressed and jewelled, and her little figure was round and symmetrical; but nothing could obscure the ignoble modelling of her face. She might have been misunderstood for a housemaid masquerading had it not been for an air of assured power, a repose as monumental as that of a Chinese joss.

She had cultivated a still radiance of expression which, when she thought it worth her while, broke into a tender or brilliant smile; although even then her large, ripe mouth retained a hint of the austerity her strong will had imposed upon it—to the more complete undoing of the masculine host. She smiled graciously as Miss Thangue murmured the introduction and moved away, but did not offer the other half of the sofa, and Isabel fetched a chair.

"You are the American cousin, of course," she said, with a slight lisp. "We were all talking about you down at our end of the table, but I could not see you until just now. I long to go to America, your novels interest me so much. But one is always so busy—one never gets time for the Atlantic. Lady Victoria says you come from that wonderful country, California, but of course you know New York and Newport still better. All Americans do."

"I have never seen Newport, and passed exactly a week in New York before sailing."

Mrs. Kaye's expressive eyes, which had dwelt on Isabel with flattering attention, fell to the tip of her cigarette. "No? I thought that all smart Americans came from that sacred precinct."

"I am not in the least smart. I don't really *know* half a dozen people in America outside of the county in which I have spent the greater part of my life—not even in San Francisco, where I was born." Isabel held her cigarette poised in one slender hand, letting her eyes fall deliberately on the broad back and flat nails of the exquisitely kept section on Mrs. Kaye's lap. "So far, in my small social ventures I have felt the necessity of little beyond good manners and a small independent income. This is my first excursion into the great world, and of course my cousin is too secure in her position to care whether I am smart or not. Miss Thangue, the only other woman I have talked with, is far too amiable and well-bred. Am I to understand that I shall be tried by New York measurements and found wanting?"

"Oh no!" Mrs. Kaye's bright color had darkened. "On the contrary, the English are always rather amused at American distinctions. It only happens that all my friends are New-Yorkers."

She was a very clever woman, for snobbery had blunted and demoralized only one small chamber of her brain, and she had as comprehensive a knowledge of the world as any woman in it. Nevertheless, as her powerful magnetic eyes met the ingenuous orbs opposite, she was unable to determine whether the barbed words, quivering in a sore spot, had been uttered in innocence or intent. "Of course

one doesn't meet so many Americans, after all. Naturally, the New-Yorkers bring the best letters." She paused a moment as if ruminating, then delivered herself of an epigram: "New York is the great American invention for separating the wheat from the tares."

"Indeed!" Isabel was too surprised to strike back.

"It is well known that it is one of the most exclusive social bodies in the world. You have far less difficulty over here."

"That may be merely owing to the fear that affects all new social bodies. I have the honor to know the leader of society in St. Peter—a town of ten thousand inhabitants near my own—and she is frightfully exclusive. She is so afraid of knowing the wrong sort of people that she is barely on nodding terms with the several thousand new-comers that have added to the wealth and importance of the town during the last ten years. Consequently, her circle is as dull as an Anglo-Saxon Sunday. I fancy the same may be said of New York, for its fashionable set is not large and its interests are far from various. From all I have heard, London society alone is perennially interesting, and the reason is, that, absolutely secure, it keeps itself from staleness by constantly refreshing its veins with new blood, exclusive only against offensiveness. Of course you are a daughter of a duke or something," she added, wickedly. "Everybody here seems to be. Don't you feel that your ancestors have given you the right to know whom you please?—instead of eternally plugging the holes in the dike."

In spite of her sharpened wits, Mrs. Kaye smiled radiantly into Isabel's guileless eyes. "I am not the daughter of a duke; I wish I were!" she exclaimed, with a

fair assumption of aristocratic frankness. "But your point is quite correct." Again she appeared to ruminate; then added: "The British aristocracy is to society what God is to the world—all-sufficient, all-merciful, all-powerful."

"And she would sacrifice Him and all his archangels to an epigram," thought Isabel, who was somewhat shocked. "How fearfully clever you are!" she murmured. "Do you think in epigrams?"

"Epigrams? Have I made one? I wish I could. They are immensely the fashion."

"I should think you might have set it—"

She did not finish her sentence, for the ear to which it was addressed suddenly closed Lady Cecilia Spence had sauntered up, and Mrs. Kaye hastily made room for her on the sofa, turning a shoulder upon Isabel. A faint change, as by the agitation of depths on the far surface of waters, rippled her features, and Isabel, summoning the impersonal attitude, watched her curiously. It was her first experience of the snob in a grandiose setting, but it was the type that had aroused her most impassioned inward protest all her life: the smallest circles have their snobs, and, like all the unchosen of mammon, she had had her corroding experiences. But her high spirit resented the power of the baser influences, and, with her intellect commanded her to accept the world with philosophy and the unsheathed weapon of self-respect. In the present stage of the world's development it was to be expected that the pettier characteristics of human nature would predominate; and perhaps the intellectually exclusive would not have it otherwise.

Mrs. Kaye, polite tolerance giving place to the accent of

intimacy, began: "Oh, Lady Cecilia, have you heard—" and plunged into a piece of gossip, no doubt of absorbing interest to those that knew the contributory circumstances and the surnames of the actors, but to the uninitiated as puzzling as success. Lady Cecilia's eyes twinkled appreciatively, and her wells of laughter bubbled close to the surface. Isabel, completely ignored, waited until the story was finished, and then made a deliberate move.

"How interesting!" she exclaimed. "Won't you tell me the names of the people?"

Mrs. Kaye, without turning her head, murmured something indistinctly, and lit another cigarette. "Won't you have a light, Lady Cecilia?" she asked.

"Please give me one," said Isabel, sweetly. She reached out and took the cigarette from Mrs. Kaye's faintly resisting hand. "Thank you. I am lazy about looking for matches. Do you smoke a lot?"

But Mrs. Kaye, irritated, or having reached the conclusion that the new-comer was not in the very least worth while, said with soft fervor to her who was: "How delightful that dear Jack was returned! Of course you are as interested in his career as the rest of us."

"I should be a good deal more so if his mother had turned him across her knee a little oftener—or if I could shake him myself occasionally."

Isabel, satisfied, more amazed than ever at the infantile ingenuousness of the snob, rose, and was about to turn away when she met Lady Cecilia's eyes. They were full of amusement, and there was no mistaking its purport. In a flash Isabel had responded with a challenge of appeal, which that accomplished dame was quick to understand.

"Please don't go," she said. "I came over here to talk to you. We are all so interested in the idea that Vicky is half an American—we had quite forgotten it. Did you ever see any one look less as if she had American cousins than Vicky? She might easily have a whole tribe of Spanish ones."

"Well, she has, in a way." And in response to many questions Isabel found herself relating the story of Rezánov and Concha Argüello, while Mrs. Kaye, whatever may have been her sensations, rose with an absent smile and composedly transferred herself to an equally distinguished neighborhood.

"I wonder if she has ever tried to condense rudeness into an epigram," said Isabel viciously, pausing in her narrative.

Lady Cecilia shook expressively. "At least she has not made an art of it," she said. "They never do."

VI

THE next morning, Isabel, after little sleep, rose early and went out for a walk. She had sat up until eleven, listening to the puzzling jets of conversation, or watching the Bridge-players, and when she had finally reached her room, tired and excited, Flora Thangue had come in for a last cigarette and half an hour of chat. Her first evening in the new world had had its clouded moments, for it was impossible not to feel the alien, and the kindness of English people, no matter how deep, is casual in expression. But on the whole she had felt more girlishly happy and ebullient than since her sister had gone her own way and left a heavy burden for young shoulders behind her. In the freedom of a girl in Europe, no matter how prized, there is much of loneliness in idleness, a constant attitude of defence, moments of bitter wonder and disgust, and, to the analytical mind, an encroaching dread of a more normal future with a chronic canker of discontent.

Isabel had by no means passed her European years in the procession that winds from the Tiber to the Seine, prostrating itself at each successive station of architecture or canvas; nor even devoted the major portion of her time to the investigation of the native, deeply as the varying types had interested her. Her intellectual ambition, as is often the case with the American provincial girl, had been even stronger than her desire for liberty and pleasure, and

she had spent several months with the archæological society of Rome, read deeply in Italian history and art, attended lectures at the Sorbonne, and spent nearly a year in Berlin, Dresden, Munich, and Vienna, studying that modern stronghold of dramatic literature, the German Theatre.

It had been the living dream of long winter evenings, when she had not dared to join in the festivities of the other young folk lest her father should stray beyond her control; he would, when the demon was quiescent, sit at home if she read to him, and she had learned to read and dream at the same time. It was only at the beginning of her third year of liberty, when, in spite of shifting scenes, the entire absence of daily cares and of heavy responsibilities involving another had given her longer hours for thought and introspection, that the poisonous doubt of the use of it all had begun to work in a mind that had lost something of the ardor of novelty. The eternal interrogations had obtruded themselves in her unfortunate girlhood, and she had questioned the voiceless infinite, but angrily, with youth's blind rebellion against the injustice of life. The anger and rebellion had been comatose in these years of freedom, but the maturer brain was the more uneasy, at times appalled. For what was she developing, perfecting herself? She had no talent, with its constant promises, its occasional triumphs, its stimulating rivalries, to give zest to life; and there were times when she envied the student girls in Munich with their absurd "reform dress," their cigarettes and beer in cheap restaurants and theatres, their more than doubtful standards. Although she had her own private faith and never hesitated to pray for anything she wanted, she was not of those that can make a career of religion; her mind and temperament were

both too complex, and she was unable to interest herself in creeds and theologies—and congregations.

Now and again she had considered seriously the study of medicine, architecture, law, of perfecting herself for criticism of some sort, for she had spoken with a measure of truth when she had assured Flora that she had no wish to marry. In her depths she was—had been—romantic and given to dreaming, but the manifold weaknesses of her father—who had been one of the most brilliant and accomplished of men, a graduate of Harvard, and the possessor of many books—and the selfish and tyrannous exactions which had tempered his enthusiasm for all things feminine, the caustic tongue and overbearing masculinity of her uncle, who had been as weak in his way as her father, for he had lost the greater part of his patrimony on the stock-market, and the charming inconsequence of her brother-in-law, who loved his family extravagantly and treated them like poor relations, had not prepared her to idealize the young men she had met in Rosewater and Europe. She had been sought and attracted more than once during her years of liberty, but her prejudices and the deep cold surface of temperament peculiar to American girls of the best class, lent a fatal clarity of vision; and although she had studied men as deeply as she dared, the result had but intensified the sombre threat of the future. It was quite true that she had half-consciously believed that hope would live again and justify itself in Elton Gwynne, and the disappointment, at the first glimpse of his portrait, was so crushing that she had buried her sex under an avalanche of scorn.

But scorn is far more volcanic than glacial and a poor barrier between sex and judgment. It needed more than

that, and more than disillusions of the second class, no matter how inordinate, to give a girl the cool reality of poise that had stimulated the curiosity of Miss Thangue; and this Isabel had encountered, during the most critical period of her inner life, in the beautiful city by the Isar. The experience had been so brief and tremendous, the incidents so crowding and tense, the climax so hideous, that she had been stunned for a time, then emerged into her present state of tranquil and not unpleasant philosophy—when the present moment, if it contained distraction, was something to be grateful for; otherwise, to be borne with until the sure compensation arrived. The future had neither terror for her nor any surpassing concern, although all her old impersonal interest in life had revived, and she was still too young not to be very much like other girls when circumstances were propitious. And at last she had conceived—or evolved—a definite purpose.

This morning she was living as eagerly as ever during her first deep months in Europe. The excitement of the evening still possessed her; she had held her own, received homage, lived a little chapter in an English novel; above all, she was young, she was free, she was no longer unhappy; and she loved the early morning and swift walking.

It was Sunday; the shooting would not begin until the morrow; everybody except herself, apparently, still slept; the breakfast-hour was half-past nine. She walked down a long lane behind the lawns and entered the first of the coverts. There was a drowsy whir of wings—once—that was all. There was a glint of dancing water in the heavier shades, a rosy light beyond the farthest of the trees in the little wood where the delicate pendent leaves hung asleep in the sweet peace. There was not an ex-

piring echo of her own wild forests here; nor any likeness to the splendid royal preserves of Germany and Austria, with their ancient trees, their miles of garnished floor, the sudden glimpse of chamois or stag standing on a rocky ledge against the sky as if drilled for his part. These woods had a quality all their own: of Nature in her last little strongholds, but smiling, serenely triumphant, of tempered heat without chill, above all, of perfect peace.

Nothing in England had impressed Isabel like this atmosphere of peace that broods over its fields and lanes, its woods and fells, in the evening and early morning hours; the atmosphere that makes it seem to be set to the tune of Wordsworth's verses, and to keep it everlastingly old-fashioned and out of all relation to its towns. As she left the wood she saw a big haystack, as firm and shapely of outline as a house, not a loose wisp anywhere. A girl, bareheaded, was driving a cow across a field. A narrow river moved as slowly as if the world had never awakened. The road turned to her right and led to an old stone village with a winding broken street and several oak-trees, a pump, and a long green bench. It might have been the Deserted Village, for the English rise far later than the Southern races that have fallen so far behind them in importance and wealth. Beyond the village, on a rise of ground, was the church, its square gray tower crumbling down upon its ancient graves. In the distance were farms, coverts, another village, a gray spire against the blossoming red of the sky; and over all —peace—peace. Had anything ever really disturbed it? Would there ever be any change? England had been devastated to the roots, would be again, no doubt, but unless it became one vast London, it would brood on

into eternity with the slight defiant smile of a beautiful woman in an enchanted sleep.

"Are you, too, an early bird?"

Isabel flew out of her reverie. Lady Victoria was approaching from a forking road. She wore a short skirt, leggings, and heavy boots; and she was bright, fresh, almost rosy from swift walking. "I have gone five miles already," she said, smiling. "But I believe you were sauntering."

"Only just now—to absorb it all. I, too, can do my five miles an hour, although Californians are the laziest people in the world about walking."

"Then if you are up to a sharp trot we'll go to that farthest village. My land steward has been telling me a painful tale about one of my young women, and I intend to ask her some embarrassing questions while she is still too stupid with sleep to lie."

"Your young women? Is all this your estate?"

"It belongs to Strathland, but I have lived here since I married, and now the place is virtually Jack's. These people have been my particular charge for thirty years and will continue to be until my son marries. There are only about a hundred families on the estate altogether, but they keep one busy."

"I can't imagine you in the working rôle of the Lady Bountiful. Last night, at least, if I had written to my friend, Anabel Colton, I should have devoted pages to your more famous attributes, but I should never have thought of this."

"Indeed? If one could languish through life in the shell of a mere beauty that life would be a good deal simpler proposition than it is. Unfortunately there are complications, and, agreeable or not, one accepts them as one

does enemies, husbands, stupid servants, and all other mortal thorns. But I am not uninterested in my people here, not by any means, and they bore me less than going to court and visiting my father-in-law. I watch them from birth, see that they are properly clothed and fed, that they go to school as soon as they are old enough, later that they find a situation here or elsewhere—those that have no work to do at home. My son gives the young men and women a complete wardrobe when they start out to win their way in life, and the details fall on me. It means correspondence, mothers' meetings, and all that sort of thing. Even during the London season I come down once a month. Of course it is a bore, but on the whole tradition is rather kind than otherwise in making life more or less of a routine."

"Wouldn't you miss it if your son married?" Isabel wondered if this woman had really given her the impression of tragic secrets, unlimited capacities for both license and arrogance. In this early morning freshness there was hardly a suggestion of the woman of the world, barely of the great lady; and in the rich tones of her voice there was a genuine note of interest in her poor.

"Oh, I should always keep an eye on them; young wives have so many distractions. If I had to give them up—yes, of course it would mean a vacancy in my collection of habits; one side of me clings strongly to traditions and duty. The other—well, I'd like to be a free-lance in the world for a while—although," she added, with a sharp intonation, "I don't suppose I should stay away from Jack very long. It is a great relief to have a vital interest in life outside one's self. You, of course, are not old enough to have discovered that; and, indeed, I am not always so sure that it is possible."

Isabel did not ask her if she would not be jealous of the wife who must, if he loved her, take the greater part of all that her "Jack" had to give; she divined in this many-sided woman a quality in her attitude towards her son with which ordinary maternal affection had little in common. Her fine eyes flashed with pride at the mention of his name, and it was more than evident that he was her deep and abiding interest; but this keen and curious young student of life had never seen any one less maternal. Lady Victoria's attitude, indeed, might as reasonably be that of a proud sister or wife. When he was beside her she looked almost commonplace in her content. The moment he passed out of her sight some phase of individuality promptly lit its torch. Last night Isabel had seen her stand for half an hour as motionless as some ivory female Colossus, only her eyes burning down with slow voluptuous fire upon an adoring little Frenchman. She had looked like a Messalina petrified with the complications and commonness of the modern world; possibly with the burden of years, Isabel had added, in girlish intolerance of the wiles of which youth is independent. She had been far from falling under her spell, although not wholly repelled by the glimpse of this worst side of a woman far too complex to be judged off-hand. This morning she liked her suddenly and warmly, and, with the lightning of instinct, divined why she worshipped her son and still was willing to have him marry and swing aside into an orbit of his own. All she needed was a certain amount of his society, opportunities to work for him, the assurance of his success and happiness. He was a refuge from herself; in his imperious demands her memory slept, her depths were stagnant. But Isabel was still too young, in spite of her

own experience, more than dimly to apprehend the older woman's attitude, and the innumerable and various acts and sufferings, disenchantments and contacts that had led up to it. Victoria seemed to her the most rounded mortal she had met, and yet with an insistent terror in the depths of her riven and courageous soul, the terror of the complete, the final disillusion. Between that moment and her too exhaustive knowledge of life stood the magnetic figure of her son, safeguarding, almost hypnotizing her. She was as incapable of jealousy as of aching vanity in the fact of a son whom the world was never permitted to forget. She had done with little things, and Isabel, with young curiosity, wondered in what convulsion the last of them had gone down.

Lady Victoria, unconscious of the analytical mind groping to conclusions beside her, was revolving the midnight comments of Flora Thangue, and her own impressions of this American relative whose sudden advent, taken in connection with her eighteenth century beauty and undecipherable quality, wrought the impression of a symbolic figure swimming out of space. Lady Victoria was far too indifferent to analyze the problems of any woman's soul, but she was keenly alive to the vital suggestion of power in the girl, and of the strong will and intellect, the command over every faculty, evidenced in the strong line of the jaw, the stern noble profile, the calm searching gaze so difficult to sustain. None knew better than Victoria the value and rarity of a free and courageous soul. Such a woman must, when more fully developed, throw the whole weight of her character into the scales balancing for the few whom she recognized as equals and accepted as friends. If she had had "some smashing love affair,"

as the more romantic Flora suggested, so much the better.

She said, with a perfectly simulated impulsiveness:

"Of course you understand that I meant what I said last evening. And not merely a week; you must pay us a long visit, if it won't bore you. But the house will rarely be empty now that the shooting has begun, and there is always something going on in the neighborhood. Later comes the hunting, and I am sure you ride."

"Oh yes, I ride! I have spent about half my life on a horse. I want to stay more than I can tell you, but before long I must go home. The same safe old bank that has charge of your ranches looks after my small affairs, and I have a man on the farm that has been in the family for forty years; otherwise I should never have dared to leave my precious chickens; but Mr. Colton writes me that Mac is failing, and before the rainy season commences I must look into things myself."

"Chickens?" said Lady Victoria, much amused. "Do you raise chickens?"

"Rather; and not in the back yard, neither. I have about a thousand of the most beautiful snow-white Leghorns with blood-red combs you ever saw; and I have incubators, runs, colony-houses, and all the rest of it. They are raised on the strictest scientific principles and yield me the greater part of my income. That is the reason I feel obliged to return—if Mac is no longer able—or willing—to get up at night. One must not neglect the chicks—the little ones. I doubt if real babies are more trouble. I don't mind telling you that I have resolved to make a fortune out of chickens, if only that I may be able to live

as I should in San Francisco. But I must go back and do the greater part of the work myself."

"Make a fortune—out of chickens! How odd that sounds! Not in the least romantic, but rather the more interesting for that. But why don't you let your ranch for dairy and grazing purposes, as we do? They bring us in a very good income—have done, so far."

"There are about nineteen thousand acres in Lumalitas, and some forty thousand in the southern ranch. I possess exactly three hundred and thirty-two, forty-five of which are marsh. You have now nearly the whole of the original grants, for as my father and uncle sold or mortgaged portions—and could not pay—your agents bought in. You may remember."

"There is seldom any correspondence. Mr. Colton has always had a free hand—yes—I do recall—vaguely. So I am profiting at your expense. I am afraid that must seem unjust to you."

"Not in the least. I did not choose my paternal relatives, but I long since accepted them with philosophy. I am thankful to have anything. Why don't you go to California and look at your property?—live on it for a few years? You could make far more out of it if you ran it yourself. The lease of Lumalitas must expire very soon. I do wish you would come and pay me a visit, and—Mr.—what on earth am I to call him?"

"Jack, of course," said Lady Victoria, warmly, although she would have been swift to resent the liberty had the new relative been so indiscreet.

"I never could manage Jack—never! I can't feel, see him, as Jack. I think Cousin Elton will do."

"Quite so. I shouldn't wonder at all if we went. Jack

is rather keen on American politics, knows his Bryce—I suppose it is in the blood. He even takes in an American Review. I have always rather wanted to visit California, and started for it once upon a time—on my wedding journey. But we were entertained so delightfully in New York and Washington that before we realized what an American summer meant it was too hot to cross the continent, and we accepted an invitation to the Adirondacks, intending to return to England in the course of a month. But Arthur broke his leg, and by the time he was well again it was not safe for me to travel. So we rented a place in Virginia, where there was good sport, and there Jack was born. Here we are. Rest under that tree while I interview the erring maiden."

VII

ISABEL sat on the bench under an ancient oak for half an hour or more, but took no note of the time. In rural America one always seems to hear the whir of distant machinery and responds to its tensity in the depths of some nerve centre; but in England's open the tendency is to dream away the hours, the nerves as blunt as in the tropics; unless, indeed, one happens to be so astir within that one rebels in responding, and conceives of ultimate hatred for this incompassionate arrogant peace of England.

Isabel had been roused from her mood of unreasoning content by her contact with the older woman, but for a few moments her thoughts waved to and fro in that large tranquillity like pendent moss in a gentle breeze. There was a stir of life in the little village; a window was thrown open; a man came out to the pump and filled a bucket with water; a child cried for its breakfast; the birds were singing in the trees. But they barely rippled the calm. Isabel's eyes dwelt absently upon a white line along a distant hill-top, made, no doubt, by Cæsar's troops; for she had heard that the mosaic floors of Roman houses had been discovered under one of the fields in the neighborhood. This information, imparted by Lord Hexam's cousin, Mrs. Throfton, a lady interested in neither Bridge nor gossip, had not excited her as it might have done before her archæological experience at headquarters, but she

was glad to recall it now, for that white road, sharply insistent in the surrounding green, was one of the perceptible vincula of history.

It was all old—old—old; an illimitable backward vista. And she was as new, as out of tune with it as the motor-car flashing like a lost and distracted comet along that hill-top in a cloud of historied dust: she with her problems, her egoisms, the fateful independence of the modern girl. In a fashion she was one of the chosen of earth, but she doubted if the women who had toiled in these villages, or in centuries past had lived their lives in the mansions of their indubious lords, had not had greater compensations than she. Unbroken monotony and a saving sense of the inevitable must in time create for the soul something of the illimitable horizon of the vast level spaces of the earth.

And she? At twenty-five she had lost her old habit of staring with veiled eyes into some sweet ambiguous future, her girlish intensity of emotion. But her theories, in general, were sound, and she had ticketed even her minor experiences. She knew that character was the most significant of all individual forces, and that if developed in strict adjustment to the highest demands of society, dragging strength out of the powers of the universe, were it not inborn, the book of one's objective future at least need never be closed prematurely by those inexorable social forces, which, whatever the weak spots on the surface of life, invariably place a man in the end according to his deserts. She had seen her father, with all his advantages of birth and talents, and early importance in the community, gradually shunned, shelved, dismissed from the daily life of steadier if less gifted men, almost unknown to the young generation. He had clung to certain strict

notions of honor through it all, however, and at his death the county had experienced a spasm of remorse and attended his funeral; the sermon had been eloquent with masterly omissions, and even the newspaper that had vilified him in his days of political influence came out with an obituary, which, when included in some future county history, would give to posterity quite as good an impression of him as he deserved.

And James Otis had had his virtues. One of his claims to redemption survived in his daughter. He had reared her in the strict principles and precepts of his New England ancestors, many of which are generally more useful in the life of a man. This early instillation, taken in connection with himself as a commanding illustration in subcontraries, had given Isabel a directness of vision invaluable to a girl in no haste to place her life in stronger hands. Whatever her dissatisfactions and disillusions, her road lay along the upper reaches; the second rate, the failures from birth, the criminal classes, far below. Her start in life was indefectible, and she knew that did the necessity arise to-morrow she could support herself and ask no quarter.

Perhaps, she mused, she would be happier in the necessity, for the problem of roof and bread is an abiding substitute for the problem of what to do with one's life. But she had never known an anxious moment regarding the bare necessities, and although there was something pleasantly stimulating in the prospect of making a fortune and being able to live as she wished in the city of her birth—the only object for which she retained any passion in her affections—she smiled somewhat cynically at the modest outlook.

Environments like the present were uplifting, almost deindividualizing, and there had been a time when she had known seconds in the face of nature's surprises that were distinct spiritual experiences. She believed they would return when she was in her own land once more, and Europe a book of fading memories. Her love of beauty at least was as keen as ever, and now that Europe was off her mind, leaving the proper sense of surfeit behind it, no doubt she would have a sense of actually beginning life when the time came to take an active part in it, and she assumed a position of some importance in her own community. She was far too sensible for ingratitude, and fully appreciated the gifts that life had so liberally dealt her. And she fully believed in work as the universal panacea. The mere thought of a busy future brought a glow to her heart. She rose with a smile as Lady Victoria emerged from the cottage at the upper end of the village.

Lady Victoria was not smiling. Her brows were drawn, and she looked angry and contemptuous.

"The little idiot!" she exclaimed, as they started briskly for home. "This is the first failure I have had in ten years. That is one of my boasts. And I took particular pains with that girl. Now Jack will have the agreeable task of coercing the man into marrying her, for it appears that his ardor has cooled."

Her brow cleared in a few moments, but she seemed to have had enough of conversation, and it was evident that words for words' sake, or as a flimsy chain between sign-posts of genuine interest, had no place in her social rubric. Isabel, who was equally indifferent, strode along beside her without so much as a comment, and so confirmed the good impression she had made on her mettlesome

relative. As they approached the house, Lady Victoria turned to her with a smile that brought sweetness to her eyes rather than any one of her more dazzling qualities.

"I am generally in my boudoir at five," she said. "Come in this afternoon for a chat before tea, if you have nothing better to do. Now run and get ready for breakfast."

VIII

WHETHER or not Mr. Gwynne had made up his mind to follow his mother's advice and employ a new weapon in his siege of Mrs. Kaye, or whether, like common mortals, he was subject to the natural impulses of youth, the most novel of the guests of Capheaton found herself on his right in the informality of breakfast, and the object of his solicitude. He fetched her bacon and toast from the sideboard, and when he discovered that she did not like cream in her tea, carried her cup back to his mother and waited for the more pungent substitute. And then he actually made an effort to entertain her. There was a flicker of surprised amusement in the neighborhood, but Isabel accepted his attentions as a matter of course, assuming that the young gentleman felt refreshed after a night's rest in his own bed, or had awakened to a sense of her importance as a member of his family. It was not until she caught Mrs. Kaye's eye and read a contemptuous power to retaliate, that she experienced a certain zest in the situation. With the magnetism of intelligent interest in her own eyes, she turned to Gwynne with a question that betrayed a flattering acquaintance with one of his less popular books, then hung upon the monologue of which he promptly delivered himself. It was characteristic that he either contributed little to the conversation or monopolized it; and he reflected, as he

talked of the personal experience which led up to the episode of her interest, that he had never before gazed into eyes at once so lovely and so fine. He disliked American girls, partly because they had shown no disposition to join the ranks of those that lived to spoil him, partly because he believed them to be shallow and cold. Some of the married women had attracted him, but not before they had lived long enough to develop the stronger qualities of the older races; he had his ideals and was not easily satisfied. He was deeply in love with Mrs. Kaye, for her brilliant subtle mind and powerful appeal to his passions had blinded him to her defects, and he was convinced that his heart had travelled to its predestined goal. Nevertheless, he decided that his new cousin, if as cold as the rest of her youthful compatriots, was worth cultivating for her intelligence and obvious talent for good-comradeship.

But in a moment a subject was started that entirely diverted his mind and upset the lively tenor of the breakfast-table.

"Where is Lorcutt?" asked some one, abruptly, referring to a brother of Lord Brathland, who had lost heavily and cheerfully at Bridge the night before.

Isabel's eyes happened to have wandered to the face of the man opposite. To her surprise it became livid. He turned instantly to Gwynne, however, and said: "I should have told you—I quite forgot—he asked me to make his excuses. He got a telegram—bad news—Bratty is dead."

Involuntarily Isabel glanced at Mrs. Kaye; Flora had hinted to her of the lady's designs. That face for once was ghastly and unmasked, but the eyes were not glittering with grief.

"Impossible!" she cried, sharply. "Lord Brathland? Why—I saw him only two days ago, in London. He was as well as possible."

The others barely noticed her. Their astonished eyes were fixed on the first speaker, Captain Ormond, who was sitting very erect, as if to receive the questions fired at him as a brave man faces the hiss of lead on the field.

"I know little," he replied; "except that Brathland was suddenly attacked by appendicitis two nights ago and that an operation was immediately performed—"

"Friday night!" cried Mrs. Kaye. "Why he spent an hour with me that afternoon, and was to dine with Lord Zeal and Lord Raglin and half a dozen other men that night—they all came up to London to talk over one of Sir Cadge Vanneck's mines. Why—I remember you were to be there. Surely Lord Brathland was well then?"

"He was looking very seedy when he came in. I happened to sit next to him—told him he ought to go home. Finally he got so bad he decided that he would, and as he left the table he fainted. Several of us saw him to bed. He said he didn't want his family fidgeting him, and the surgeon said he would be all right in a few days. I thought he was out of danger when I came down last night, so said nothing about it to Harold."

"Was he taken home?" asked Gwynne, whose eyes had never left Ormond's face.

"No—to Raglin's room up-stairs. The dinner was at the Club."

"I cannot understand why his family was not summoned at the last!" exclaimed Lady Victoria.

"Well, there's only the old duke and Harold, you see. Dick is out in Africa. I suppose they didn't want to

agitate the duke until the last moment and couldn't find Harold until this morning. Besides, Raglin was with him, and he is a relative, at least. It is awfully sudden. I have been upset ever since Harold woke me up this morning and told me; and hated to speak of it."

"Who was the surgeon?" asked Gwynne.

"Ballast."

"Ballast? Who is he? Why not one of the big men, in heaven's name?" cried Mrs. Kaye.

"Well—they were all out of town—naturally enough at this time of year. We had to take what we could get. No doubt Lester or Masten was telegraphed for later. I—all of us—left the affair in Raglin's hands."

The company broke into general comment, and under cover of the confusion Isabel distinctly heard Gwynne demand:

"What's up your sleeve, Ormond?"

And the response: "For God's sake, old chap, don't ask!"

IX

GWYNNE had never recognized the contingency of a serious rival in the affections of the woman he had elected to mate, and had he heard of the late Lord Brathland's attentions it would not have occurred to him that Mrs. Kaye could weigh a prospective dukedom against the reflected glories of his own career. He intended to be prime-minister before he was forty, and older and soberer heads shared his confidence. It was true that Mrs. Kaye was an emphatic Conservative—scorning even the compromise of Liberal-Unionism—and that so far he had been unable to convert her; but he did not take any woman's political convictions very seriously, knowing that they commonly owed their inspiration to social ambition, a desire for a career, or to marital comradeship. The latter he made no doubt would operate in his own case as soon as the lady gave him the opportunity to demand it as his right; and his sharp political discussions with her were among the spiciest of his experiences. She rarely expressed herself in every-day language; and although it had crossed his mind that epigrammatic matrimony might grow oppressive, he had reminded himself that her speech was but a part of a too cultivated individuality and would be unable to endure the strain of daily intercourse. Although he had in his composition little of the femininity that gives a certain type of man a sympathetic compre-

hension of women, his Celtic blood imparted a subtle understanding of their foibles of which he was but half aware. More than once this subconscious penetration had induced a speedy recovery from misplaced affections; but the toils of Julia Kaye, who piqued, allured, repelled, dazzled, now and again snubbed every one else for his sake, bound him helpless. He was grateful for his mother's abetment, although it somewhat surprised him; but his mother was the woman of whom he had the least comprehension.

So far Mrs. Kaye had ignored his several proposals, but of this he thought nothing. He would have cared little for a woman to be had for the asking; and he rather welcomed any treatment that stirred the somewhat sluggish surfaces of his nature.

He had determined, however, to force a definite answer from her during this visit, and although he was far too courteous a host to embarrass a guest, he knew that were Mrs. Kaye deliberately to grant him a private interview he should be at liberty to press his suit.

Immediately after the hour in the smoking-room that followed breakfast, he started in search of her; but although many of the women were scattered throughout the lower rooms, reading, writing, gossiping, he saw nothing of his inamorata. Flora Thangue happened to be standing alone, and he went up to her impulsively.

"Do you know if Julia has gone to church?" he asked, without circumlocution.

"She went to her room directly after breakfast. I fancy she is rather cut up over Lord Brathland's death," replied the astute Miss Thangue.

"Of course; we all are—poor Bratty! He was rather a

bounder, but it is natural to recall his virtues. Flora, go and tell her I want her to come for a walk. I can't go to her room myself, and I don't care to send a servant."

Miss Thangue reflected. Probably this was the most favorable moment for a repulse that he could have chosen. She was sincerely fond of him and distrusted Mrs. Kaye as much as she disliked her.

"Very well," she said. "I will see what I can do."

Mrs. Kaye admitted her promptly and presented an unstained front, although her color was lower than usual. She was a woman of too much natural and acquired poise to remain askew under any shock. But she had experienced an hour of mixed emotions in which a confused and wondering sense of defeat was paramount. It had left her a little aghast, for although she had met with the inevitable snubs in her upward course, she rarely permitted them to agitate her memory in these days when she had grown to believe herself one of the spoiled favorites of destiny; and her fibres were by no means sensitive. But this sudden blow was a reminder that fate had been capricious to spoiled darlings before. She had stood almost motionless before the window from the moment she had entered her room until Miss Thangue knocked at the door, and by that time she had repoised herself and set her heavy mouth in a hard line as she reflected upon her own will as a factor in any game with life.

"Jack wants you to go for a walk," announced Miss Thangue, who saw no occasion for subtlety.

"That means he intends to propose again," said Mrs. Kaye, in her carefully modulated voice. "I don't know that I care about it. I have letters to write."

"Why not get it over? You could compel him to

believe, if you chose, that you have no intention of marrying him, and it would be rather a kindness; he has so much else to think about, and he certainly should have a free mind before the opening of Parliament. If you really did Jack any harm," she added, deliberately, "Vicky would never forgive you—nor a good many others."

"I wouldn't do him any harm for the world," said Mrs. Kaye, casting down her eyes and looking very young and innocent. "But I should hate to give him up. After all, there is no one half so interesting. Well, I'll go down and have it over."

A few moments later she joined Gwynne at the foot of the staircase, and they went out to the woods. She looked her best in a smart walking-frock of white tweed, and a red toque; for the tailor costume modifies where the elaborate accentuates.

Her brilliant eyes melted as Brathland's name was mentioned; naturally at once.

"What a dreadful—shocking thing!" she cried. "I do not realize it at all. Poor dear, we were such friends—and I saw him only a few hours before. Have you heard anything more?"

"Ormond ran off to town directly after breakfast—as if he were afraid of being asked too many questions. I have an idea that he kept the cat in the bag. I saw my cousin Zeal yesterday, and thought he looked as if he had something besides his health on his mind."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Kaye, startled. "What else could it be?"

"Well, Bratty was rather a flasher," said Gwynne, innocently. "The dinner may not have been at the Club at all, and there is a little chorus-girl that engaged the

fickle Bratty's affections for a time, and proclaimed her desire for vengeance from the house-tops when he transferred himself to a rival at the Adelphi. She is a Neapolitan, and that sort may carry a stiletto even in prosaic old London. Or perhaps poor Bratty was despatched with the carving-knife. No wonder he didn't want his family. But whatever it was, he has paid the penalty himself, poor chap, and no doubt the matter will be hushed up."

"How disgusting! I don't want to think of human slums on this heavenly Sunday morning."

"Nor to be proposed to, I suppose?"

"I don't mind, Jack dear."

She looked girlish and very piquant. Jack took her hand. She did not withdraw it, and they walked silently in the shadowed quiet of the wood. His heart beat almost audibly. Never before had she given him such definite encouragement. He could think of nothing to say that would not sound banal to this woman of the ready tongue. But agitation unlocks wayward fancies and sends them scurrying inopportunely across the very foreground of the mind. The vagrant hope that she would not accept him in an epigram restored his balance, and he turned to her with his habitual air of confidence, albeit his eyes and mouth were restless.

"I want an answer to-day," he said, boldly. "And there is only one answer I will take. I have let you play with me, as that seemed to be your caprice, and I love caprice in a woman. But there is an end to everything and I want to marry before Parliament meets."

"And you never thought I would not marry you?" she asked, in some wonder.

"I have never faced the possibility of failure in my life.

And you are as much to me as my career. I cannot imagine life without either."

He suddenly put his hand under her chin and lifted her face; she was of tiny stature and this disadvantage in the presence of man was not the least subtle of her charms. "Say yes quickly," he cried, and the strength of his will and passion vibrated to her through the medium he had established. But she pouted and drew back.

"Perhaps I want a career of my own. You would swallow me whole."

"You could become the most powerful woman in the Liberal party—have a salon and all the rest of it."

"I happen to be a Conservative."

"What has that to do with it? Or politics with love, for that matter? Tell me that you love me. That is all I care about."

"It is only during the engagement that love is all. Marriage is the great public school of life; the passions fall meekly into their proper place—beside the prosaic appetites, the objective demands; somewhat below the faculties that distinguish the higher kingdom."

"Indeed? Well, I am sanguine enough to believe that we would prove the exception. I hardly dare think of it!" he burst out. "For God's sake keep your epigrams for other people and be a woman pure and simple."

She looked both as she permitted her full red mouth to tremble and his arms to take sudden possession of her.

X

IN the large liberty of an English country-house Isabel might have found the long morning tedious had she been of a more sociable habit. Lady Victoria, Mrs. Throfton, and Lady Cecilia Spence went to church; all three, as great ladies, having a dutiful eye to the edification of humbler folk. Flora Thangue spent the greater part of the morning writing letters for her hostess, the men fled to the golf-links, and the rest of the women not engaged in vehement political discussion, or Bridge, were striding across country. Isabel, tempted by the charmingly fitted writing-table in her room, although an indolent correspondent, wrote a long and amply descriptive letter to her sister, which her brother-in-law, being more than usually hard up at the moment of its arrival, transposed into fiction and illustrated delightfully for a local newspaper. Then she roamed about looking at the pictures, testing her European education by discovering for herself the Lelys and Mores, the Hoppners, Ketels, Holbeins, Knellers, Dahls, and Romneys. She had a quick instinct for the best in all things, but cared less for pictures than for other treasures of the past: marbles, the architecture in old streets, hard brown schlosses on their lonely heights, the Gothic spaces of cathedrals, the high and fervent imaginations, immortal yet nameless, in the carvings on stone; the jewelled

façades of Orvieto and Siena, the romantic grandeur of the Alhambra.

She opened a door at the back of the central hall and found herself in a pillared corridor with a door at either end. Both rooms were open, and as a blue cloud hung about the entrance to the left, she turned to what proved to be the library of Capheaton. It was a square light apartment, with the orthodox number of books, but with so many desks and writing-tables that it looked more like the business corner of the mansion. Here, indeed, as Isabel was to learn, Lady Victoria held daily conference with her housekeeper and stewards, interviewed the women of the tenantry, and those active and philanthropic ladies of every district that aspire to carry the burdens of others. Here Gwynne kept his Blue Books and thought out his speeches, but it was not a favorite room with the guests.

Isabel had found many books scattered about the house, solid and flippant, old and new, but nothing by her host. She rightly assumed that his works would be disposed for posterity in the family library, and found them on a shelf above one of the large orderly tables. As a matter of fact she had read but two of his books, and she selected another at random and carried it to a comfortable chair by the window. The work was an exposition of conditions in one of the South African colonies, containing much criticism that had been defined by the Conservative press as youthful impertinence, but surprisingly sound to the unprejudiced. What had impressed Isabel in his other books and claimed her admiration anew was his maturity of thought and style; she saw that this volume had been published when he was twenty-four, written, doubtless, when he was

a year or two younger. She felt a vague pity for a man that seemed to have had no youth. Since his graduation from Balliol in a blaze of glory he had worked unceasingly, for he appeared to have found little of ordinary recreation in travel. She wondered if he would take his youth in his bald-headed season, like the self-made American millionaire.

His style, pure, lucid, virile, distinguished, might have been the outcome of midnight travail, or, like his eloquence on the platform, a direct flight from the quickened brain. It certainly bore no resemblance to his amputated table talk. But in a moment she dismissed her speculations, for she had discovered a quality, overlooked before, but arresting in the recent light of his cold arrogance and haughty self-confidence. Behind his strict regard for facts and the keen insight and large grasp of his subject, which, without his evident care for the graces, would have distinguished his work from the dry report of equally conscientious but less gifted men, was the lonely play of a really lofty imagination, and a noble human sympathy. As she read on, this warm full-blooded quality, tempered always by reason, grew more and more visible to her alert sense; and when the fires in his mind blazed forth into a revelation of a passionate love of beauty, both in nature and in human character, Isabel realized what such a man's power over his audience must be; when this second self, so effectually concealed, suddenly burst into being.

"It is too bad a woman would have to live with the other!" she thought, as she raised her eyes and saw Gwynne emerge from the woods with Mrs. Kaye. "I cannot say that I envy her."

"By Jove, they have an engaged look!"

Isabel turned with a start, but greeted Lord Hexam with a smile. He was as yet her one satisfactory experience of the young English nobleman, whom, like most American girls, she had unconsciously foreshadowed in doublet and hose. Hexam was quite six feet, with a fine military carriage; he had been in the Guards and had not left the army until after two years of active service; his blue eyes were both honest and intelligent, and he was generally clean cut and highly bred.

He drew up a chair beside Isabel and reflected that she was even handsomer than he had thought, with the sunlight warming the ivory whiteness of her skin, although it contracted the mobile pupils of her eyes; and that little black moles when rightly placed were more attractive than he had thought possible. They gave a sort of daring unconscious eighteenth-century coquetry to what was otherwise a somewhat severe style of beauty. But he was a man for whom a woman's hair had a peculiar fascination, and while they were uttering commonplaces at random his eyes wandered to the soft yet massive coils encircling Isabel's shapely head, and lingered there.

"Pardon me!" he said, boyishly. "But I always thought —don't you know?—that hair like that was only in novels and poems and that sort of thing. Is it all your own?" he asked, with sudden suspicion.

"You would think so if you had to carry it for a day. I should have had it cut off long ago if it had happened to be coarse hair. It is an inherited evil of which I am too vain to rid myself. The early Spanish women of my family all had hair that touched the ground when they stood up. I have an old sketch of a back view of three of them taken side by side; you see nothing but billows of

fine silky hair. But I have put it out of sight, as it looks rather like an advertisement for a famous hair restorer."

"I'd give a lot to see yours down. It's wonderful—wonderful!"

"Well, I have promised a private view to some of the women. If Lady Victoria thinks it quite proper perhaps I'll admit you."

"I'll ask her for a card directly she comes home. Let it be this afternoon just after tea."

"I wonder if they really are engaged," said Isabel, who had been told that Englishmen never paid compliments, and was growing embarrassed under the round-eyed scrutiny. Gwynne and Mrs. Kaye had paused by a sundial.

"Who? Oh yes, I should think so, although there was some talk that poor Bratty—but no doubt that was mere rumor, or Mrs. Kaye wouldn't be on with Jack like that. By Jove, he *is* engaged. I never saw him look so—so—well, I hardly know what."

"Do you approve of the match?"

"If my consent is asked I shall give them my blessing. He is the salt of the earth, although a bit lumpy now and then; and she is such a jolly little thing, full of genuine affection—just the wife for Jack."

"You believe in her, then?" Isabel wondered, as many another has done, at the miasma that seems to rise and dim a man's perceptive faculties when he is called upon to estimate the worth of a fascinating woman.

"Rather! Don't you?"

"She struck me as being one of the few people without a redeeming virtue. To be sure that has a distinction of its own."

"Oh!" He wondered if so handsome a girl shared the common rancor of her age and sex against charming young widows.

"And the worst mannered," continued Isabel, who knew exactly what he thought. "And plebeian in her marrow. I wish my cousin had chosen Miss Thangue or any one else."

"But he couldn't marry Flora," said the literal young nobleman. "She hasn't a penny, and is the friend of all our mothers. But I'm sorry you've such a bad opinion of Mrs. Kaye. She's tremendously popular with us. I'm not one of her circle—retinue would be more like it; but I've always thought her the brightest little thing going, and I'm sure she wouldn't harm a fly."

"I'm sure she would do nothing so little worth her while. Well, there is no need for your eyes to be opened; but I wish that my cousin's might be. I suppose that you have the same faith in him that so many others—himself included—seem to have."

"Rather!—You are a most critical person. Haven't you?"

"I think I have. In fact I am sure of it. That is the reason I have been wishing he were an American."

He laughed boyishly. "That is a good one! But we need him over here. You haven't the slightest idea how much. We get into a blue funk every time Zeal takes a cold on his chest. To quote Mrs. Kaye, 'A Liberal peer is as useful as a fifth wheel to a coach, and as ornamental as whitewash.' Clever, ain't it?"

"I think people are touchingly easy to satisfy! I have been treated to several of Mrs. Kaye's epigrams and heard as many more quoted. It seems to me that nothing could

be easier than the manufacture of that popular superfluity."

"Perhaps—with time to think them out beforehand. Anyhow, it's rather jolly to hear things you can remember."

"I should be the last to deny her cleverness," said Isabel, dryly. But being by no means desirous that he should find her too acid, she dropped her eyes for a moment, then raised two dazzling wells of innocence. "I am tired of the subject of my cousin and Mrs. Kaye," she murmured. "Are you as ambitious as Jack?"

"No use." He stared helplessly down into the blue flood. "There is no escape from the 'Peers' for me, although my father, I am happy to say, is as healthy as I am. But after the brain cells become brittle—one never knows. I too am a Liberal, and am getting in all the good work of which I am capable while there is yet time. I don't go as far as Jack—don't want to see the 'Peers' chucked. I have a strong reverence for traditions, and no taste whatever for democracy—that would be too long a step. And I think a man should be content to be useful, do the best he can, in his own class; and be loyal to that class whatever happens. Of course I understand Jack's point of view, because I understand him so well, and know that he would be the most maimed and wretched man on earth in the Upper House; but personally, I think one should be prepared to accept inherited responsibilities."

And then, as they were both young, and mutually attracted, they found many subjects of common interest to keep them in the library until the gong summoned them to luncheon.

XI

FLORA THANGUE, after luncheon, took Isabel out in a pony cart, and although too loyal to gossip intimately about her patrons, incidentally directed a searchlight into certain of their recesses; a light that was to prove useful to Isabel in her future intercourse with them, although it did not in the least prepare her for an experience that awaited her later in the day. Miss Thangue's mind was occupied at first with the obvious engagement of Gwynne and Mrs. Kaye.

"That woman was born to upset calculations!" she exclaimed. "Yonder is the castle of the dukes of Arcot. We are going over to a party to-morrow night. It really looks like a castle with all those gray battlements and towers, doesn't it? We don't call every tuppeny-hapenny villa inhabited by a nobleman a 'castle' as they do in Germany and Austria. Well—that clever little panther! I'd like to pack her into one of her own epigrams and bury her alive. I *know* she was as good as engaged to Brathland. Now, having decided that, all things considered, Jack is the best match going—for everybody believes Lord Zeal to be worse than he is—well! there is something appalling in a woman who can adjust herself as quickly as that; whose caprices, sentiments, passions, all natural impulses, are completely controlled by her reason. I wish Vicky saw through her; she has so much influence over

Jack, and such deadly powers of ridicule. But Vicky, like all spoiled women of the world, is as much the victim of the subtle flatterer as any man, and Julia Kaye has managed her beautifully. She considered Jack for a bit before she was sure of Brathland. Vicky's real reason for indorsing Julia Kaye—between us—is because she believes her to be one of that small and select band that can hold a man on all his various sides, and she wants to avoid the probability of an absorbing and possibly tragic liaison—like Parnell's, for instance—which might interfere with, perhaps ruin, Jack's career. That is all very well, as far as it goes, but I believe Julia Kaye to be so entirely selfish that when Jack finds her out he will sicken of life. I have had the best of opportunities to study women, and I have brought Jack up—I had the honor to be the highly idealized heroine of his calf-love, and have been more or less in his confidence ever since. In certain ways I understand him better than his mother does, for she has seen too much of the worst side of men, and is at heart too *blasée* to have much respect for or knowledge of their spiritual side; and if I have ever had any maternal spasms in my virtuous spinsterhood they have been over Jack. Can't you help us out?" she asked, turning suddenly to the stranger, to whom she was powerfully attracted. "Are you as indifferent as you look?"

"I have no idea! But although I should not in the least object to be cast for a part in this domestic drama, I don't care for it at the price of too much 'Jack.' To attempt to cut out Mrs. Kaye I should need a little genuine enthusiasm; and frankly, your beloved prodigy does not inspire it. I like Lord Hexam far better.

"Oh, Jimmy! He's a fine fellow, but only a type."

"He hasn't a rampant ego, if that is what you mean. And for every-day purposes—" She shrugged her shoulders. "I could endure and even be deeply interested in Elton Gwynne if he happened to be my brother and I could hook my finger in his destiny; but in any other capacity—no, thank you!"

"Are you going to marry Jimmy?"

"I did not even know he was not already married. Do you see nothing in a man but a husband over here? If I ever do marry it will not be before I am forty."

"That is rather long—if you see much of the world meanwhile! And Jimmy, although there is not much money in the family—about twenty thousand a year—would be a very good match. He will be Earl of Hembolt—a fine old title."

"You assume that such a plum may be pulled by the first comer."

"Rather not! But you Americans have such a way with you! What is more to the point, I never saw him so bowled over."

"Well," said Isabel, imperturbably, "I will think of it. This English country and these wonderful old houses, with their inimitable atmosphere, appeal to me very strongly. I have more the feeling of being at home here than I had even in Spain, where I have roots. And socially and picturesquely, there is nothing to compare with the position of an English noblewoman."

Flora turned her eyes frankly to the classic profile beside her. Isabel had removed her hat, and, framed in the heavy coils of her hair, her features impressed the anxious observer as even more Roman than early American; although had she but reflected she would have remembered

that the type of the Cæsars had its last stronghold in the United States of the eighteenth century. Isabel looked like a very young Roman matron, but her resemblance to the stately effigies in the galleries of Florence and Rome, strong in virtue or vice, was so striking that once more Flora longed for her support. A woman with such capabilities would be wasted in the rôle of a mere countess —but as the wife of an aspiring Liberal statesman! She devoutly wished that the American had arrived six months earlier, or that Brathland still lived.

But she was a very tactful person and was about to drop the subject, when Isabel slowly turned her eyes. They looked so much like steel that for the moment they seemed to have lost their blue.

"I have made up my mind to do something to prevent this marriage," she announced. "I do not know what, as yet. I shall be guided by events."

And Flora devoutly kissed her, then gossipped pleasantly about the other guests and the people in the neighborhood. Isabel was curious to know something of the duchess she was to meet on the morrow.

"Does she really look like a duchess?" she asked, so innocently that Flora laughed and forgot the Roman-American profile, and the fateful eyes that had given her an uncomfortable sensation a moment before.

"Well—yes—she does—rather. It is the fashion in these days not to—to be smart above all things, excessively democratic, animated, unaffected, clever. But our duchess here is rather old-fashioned, very lofty of head and expression. She has a look of floating from peak to peak, and although passée is still a beauty. To be honest, she is hideously dull, but as good a creature as ever lived,

and all that the ideal duchess should be—so high-minded that she has never suspected the larkiest of her friends."

"Well, I am glad she looks the rôle. I have artistic cravings."

They drove for an hour through the beautiful quiet green country, past many old stone villages that might have been the direct sequence of the cave era. An automobile skimmed past and the pony sat down on its haunches. Isabel had a glimpse of a delicate high-bred face set like a panel in a parted curtain.

"That is the duchess," said Miss Thangue. "She wouldn't wear goggles for the world, and only gets into an automobile occasionally to please the duke. There is nothing old-fashioned about him."

"She looks as if her name ought to be Lucy," said Isabel, to whom the pure empty face had appeared like a vision from some former dull existence, and left behind it an echo of insupportable ennui.

XII

ISABEL had looked forward all day to the promised talk with the somewhat formidable relative for whom, however, she had conceived one of those enthusiasms peculiar to her age and sex. Her wardrobe was barren of the costly afternoon gowns smart women affect, but she put on an organdie, billowy with many ruffles, that consorted with the season, at least. Blue cornflowers were scattered over the white transparent surface, and she possessed no more becoming frock. Had she been on her way to a tryst with Lord Hexam she would have thrust a rose in her hair, accentuated the smallness of her waist with a blue ribbon, the whiteness of her throat with a line of black velvet; but she had the instinct of dress, which teaches, among many things, that self-consciousness in external adornment provokes amusement in other women.

She had not the least idea where to find Lady Victoria's boudoir, although a casual reference by Flora Thangue suggested that it was on the bedroom floor. She lost herself in the interminable corridors and finally ran into Elton Gwynne.

"Your mother expects me—where is her boudoir?" she asked.

He was at peace with the world, and answered, good-naturedly: "I'll pilot you. Her rooms are over on the other side."

"You look as if you should be congratulated about something," she said, demurely. "There are all sorts of rumors flying about."

She had half-expected to be snubbed, but he was not in the humor to snub anybody. "You can congratulate me!" he said, emphatically. "The most wonderful woman in the world has promised to marry me."

"I hope you will be happy," said Isabel, conventionally. She resented his sudden drop from his pedestal, for he looked sentimental and somewhat sheepish. Still, her youth warmed to his in spite of herself, and again he noticed with a passing surprise that her eyes were both lovely and intellectual. He was hardly aware that coincidently his Julia's eyes met his mental vision with a glance somewhat too hard and brilliant, but he caught Isabel's hand and gave it a little shake.

"Thank you!" he exclaimed. "That was said as if you jolly well meant it. There are my mother's rooms."

He went off whistling, and Isabel raised her hand and looked at it meditatively; his own had been unexpectedly warm and magnetic. She had imagined that his grasp would be cold and loose.

He had indicated a private corridor, and she entered it and approached a door ajar. There was no response to her knock, but as she was expected, and Lady Victoria no doubt was still dressing, she pushed open the door and entered. The room was empty, but Isabel was instantly impressed with its reflection of an individuality, although of a side that had attracted her least. Here was none of the old-time stiffness of Capheaton, and there was a conspicuous absence of dead masters and their pupils. It was not a large room. The walls were covered with a

Japanese gold paper to within four feet of the floor where it was met by a tapestry of Indian cashmeres, and from it was separated by a narrow shelf set thick with photographs in silver frames, and with odd and exquisite bibelots. On the walls were artists' sketches, and two or three canvases of the Impressionist and Secessionist schools, expressive of the ardent temperaments of their creators. In the place of honor was a painting of Salambô in the folds of her python.

There were several deep chairs and a mighty divan covered with gold-colored cushions and a tiger-skin, whose mate was on the floor. The gloom of the afternoon was excluded by heavy gold-colored curtains, and the only, but quite sufficient light, filtered through an opalescent globe upheld by a twisted bronze female of the modern Munich school, that looked like nothing so much as Alice elongating in Wonderland.

Isabel suddenly felt herself and her organdie absurdly out of place in this room with its enchantress atmosphere. She wished that Lady Victoria had made the appointment for the library, which was equally in tune with another side of her.

She was even meditating a retreat, inexplicably embarrassed, when an inner door opened and Lady Victoria entered. She wore a tea-gown of a sort, black and yellow, open over the soft lace of a chemisette, although a dog-collar of tiny golden sequins clasped her throat. In her hair a golden butterfly trembled, and in that light she would have looked little older than her guest had it not been for the expression of her face. It was this expression that arrested Isabel even more than the toilette, as she moved towards the divan without a word of greeting.

It looked as if it had been put on with the costume, both intended to express a mood of the wearer: which might have been that of a tigress whose ferocity was slowly awakening with the approach of the victim. The black eyes were heavy with the lust of conquest, the points of the mouth turned up more sharply than usual; there was an insatiable vanity in the commanding poise of her head. She was as little like the woman of the morning as the sun is like the midnight, and Isabel experienced a positive terror of her.

Feeling sixteen and very foolish, she sank to the edge of a chair and muttered something about the charm of the room. Then, as Lady Victoria, who had arranged herself among the shining pillows, continued to stare at her with absolutely no change of expression, it dawned upon her that she had not been expected but that some one else was. With too little presence of mind left to retire gracefully and too much pride to appear to have ventured into the cave of Venus unasked, she managed to articulate her gratitude for the invitation of the morning.

"Oh!" Lady Victoria's eyebrows expressed a flicker of intelligence. "I hope you have managed not to bore yourself."

Isabel plunged into an account of her drive, to which Lady Victoria, who had lit a long Russian cigarette, paid no attention whatever. Her expression was still petrified, except that she might have had the scent of blood in her slightly dilating nostrils.

Suddenly the slow flame in her eyes burned upward, and Isabel, her head fairly jerking about, saw that a man had entered and was advancing rapidly across the room, his heavy eyes wide with admiration. It was the French-

man whom Lady Victoria had honored with so much of her attention the evening before.

He raised to his lips the pointed fingers negligently extended, and murmured something to which Lady Victoria replied in French as pure and fluent as his own; and in a low rich voice, with not an echo in it of her habitual abruptness or haughty languor.

The Frenchman accepted a cigarette and a low chair opposite the divan, whose golden cushions seemed subtly to embrace the yielding flexible figure against them. Neither took the slightest notice of the third person beyond a muttered introduction and acknowledgment, and as the man embarked on a soft torrent of speech, bearing the burden of his beatitude in at last meeting the only Englishwoman whose fame in Paris was as great as among her native fogs, Isabel rose and retreated with what dignity she could summon. Then Lady Victoria, seeing that she was rid of her, and courteous under all her idiosyncrasies, rose with a long motion of repressed energy and accompanied her to the door, her hand resting lightly against the crisp organdie belt.

"Will you pour out the tea for me?" she asked, sweetly. "I doubt if I go down."

No small part of her dangerous fascination lay in her sincerity. She really liked Isabel, although it was characteristic of her that she did not in the least care at what conclusions that puzzled young woman might arrive in a more solitary meditation.

When Isabel found herself in the long cool corridor, set thick with gentle landscapes, and hunting squires, and dames haughty and humble, she drew a long breath of relief, as if she had escaped from a jungle. But she felt

oddly wounded in her self-love, young and silly. She had thought herself old in the last three years, tremendously modern. What did she know? The easy morals of students in France and Germany had repelled her at first, but she had ended by accepting them as a matter of course, and had rather plumed herself upon her accumulating grains and blends of human nature. She felt a rush of contempt for their crudity. What children they were with their simple unmorality of artists, as ignorant of the real world as babes in a wood!

When she reached her own room she astonished herself by bursting into a passion of tears. It was some time before she understood what had induced it. It was not that the illusions of youth had received a hard blow, for many of them had disappeared long since in Paris, when she had supported an American girl of decent family but too much liberty through the most desperate experience that a young woman, alone and friendless in a foreign city, well could have. The girl had died cursing all men and the folly of women, and after Isabel had buried her and the leading cause of her repentance, she returned to her lonely flat in a state of disillusion and disgust which seemed to encase her by no means susceptible heart in a triple panoply. This state of mind had lasted for at least three months. And there was little of which she had not abstract knowledge, nor had she lived a quarter of a century to learn for the first time of the license which the world permits to women so highly placed that they have come to believe themselves above all laws.

But all her experience and abstract knowledge counted for nothing, and she had for the first time a sudden and complete appreciation of the evil of the world and of its

odd association with even the higher virtues; of the fact that in the upper walks of life the balance was more nearly even than on planes where there existed scantier opportunities for development. There was no question that Victoria Gwynne was made on a magnificent plan, as capable of heroism, no doubt, as any of the salient women of history. She was an ornament in her world, useful, sympathetic, the author of much good, a devoted and inspiring mother. And yet there was no more question that this Frenchman was the last of a long line of favored adorers than that Victoria, for all her individualities, was but a type of her kind: a kind that was sufficiently distinct from the hundreds of wholly estimable women that were proud to know her, or accepted her as a matter of course.

And even these good women? Had they not the same passions, the same inclinations in the secrecies of their souls? What was the determining cause of their indisputable virtue? A happy marriage? Too many children? Timidity? Absence of temptation? Or were they merely orthodox through a more uneven balancing of their qualities, the animal in abeyance? For this very reason were they not frequently narrow, unsympathetic, unuseful —unless, indeed, they were of the few who, with the mighty temptations of the Victoria Gwynnes, were mightier still in their fidelity to some inner and cherished ideal. This lofty ideal of womanhood Isabel had unconsciously set up in her soul, and the sudden conviction of its imperfection was, after all, the reason of her sudden despair. For the soul with its immemorial and often incommunicable knowledge may have its moments of terror while the mind wonders.

And she was disheartened at the sense of insignificance

and mortification inspired by this contact with a side of life, as real and consequent as motherhood or government, instead of feeling merely repelled, infinitely superior in her unstained maidenhood. She had no wish to emulate, but neither did she relish feeling provincial, a chit, an outsider. Her youthful vanity had its way in a mind too speculative, intelligent, observant, merely to be shocked. Her memory reverted to experiences that had made her feel as much older than the ordinary girl as she now felt at sea. What was she, Isabel Otis, after all? She felt a mere assortment of fluids, which might or might not crystallize into some such being as she had dimly apprehended, or into something quite commonplace; realized with a shock that her own deep personal experience had left her less definitely moulded than she had imagined.

She rose impatiently and bathed her eyes before ringing for the maid to lace her for dinner—it was long past tea-time. "Perhaps I had better marry Lord Hexam and have ten children," she thought. "That sort of existence has kept more women up to the correct standard than anything else except poverty."

XIII

"AND is this really your first big party?" asked Hexam, wonderingly.

"The first! The first! And I am twenty-five! Just think of it! Of course I have been to students' balls, and little parties in Rosewater. But a function—never before."

"This is hardly a function—parties even in the big political country-houses are more or less informal."

"Informal! The jewels fairly blind my provincial eyes. And this is a real castle!"

"Oh yes, it is a castle," he said, laughing outright. "I suppose you have read up its record?" he added, teasingly. "You industrious and curious Americans know a lot more about us than we know about ourselves."

"Of course I know the history of this castle. I haven't the least doubt you know every word of it yourself. I have already learned that the English are not nearly so vacant-minded as, in their curious pride, they would have one believe."

She threw back her head, half-closing her eyes in the ecstasy of her new experience. The dancing was in the picture-gallery, an immense room, in which there were many dark paintings of the old Italian and Spanish schools, besides the presentments of innumerable Arcots by the usual popular masters of the Dutch and English. The

ceiling was of stone and vaulted, but set thick with electric lights, blazing down from their great height like the crystal stars of the tropics. It had seemed to Isabel that after entering the castle she had walked for ten minutes before reaching this room, where as brilliant a company was disporting itself as she was likely to look upon in England. The Duke of Arcot was an energetic Conservative and a member of the present cabinet, but his social attentions were ever directed to the prominent and interesting of whatever party or creed. As he found a particular zest in being surrounded by smart bright and pretty women, the parties at the castle, and at Arcot House in London, were seldom surpassed in either brilliancy or interest. And as his rent-roll was abnormal, there was no sign of dilapidation within the gray walls and towers of the ancient castle, but much comfort and luxury against a background of countless treasures accumulated throughout the centuries. He had taken an immediate fancy to Isabel and promised to show her the lower rooms as soon as she tired of dancing.

Hexam watched her with an amused indulgence that in no wise tempered his mounting admiration. She was radiant. Her blue eyes were shining and almost black, her cheeks flooded with a delicate pink. She wore a gown of white tulle upon whose floating surface were a few dark-blue lilies. The masses of her black hair were piled on her head in the fashion of her Californian grandmothers, and confined by a high Spanish comb of gold and tortoise-shell. Her only other jewel was a long string of Baja California pearls that had glistened on warm white necks in many an old California ballroom before ever an American had crossed the threshold of Arcot Castle. They

had been given by Concha Argüello, when she assumed the gray habit of the Third Order of the Franciscan nuns, to the wife of her brother Santiago and so had come down to Isabel.

And to-night this descendant of that powerful clan, unimaginable in her modern complexities to their simple minds, was receiving homage in the ballroom of one of the greatest houses in Europe. For there was no question, even in the minds of the young married women, who carry all before them in English society, that the American girl had created a furore among the men. Isabel had confided to the duke, who had lunched that day at Capheaton, and to Hexam, her haunting fear of being a wall-flower, and both had vowed that she should have no lack of partners at her first English ball. But to Hexam's disgust, at least, their solicitude came to an untimely end, and he was able to secure but two waltzes and a square dance. The duke had spoken for the cotillon, which he had no intention of dancing. He was a most estimable person, but he never ignored an opportunity to talk with a new and interesting woman.

Isabel could hardly have failed to be a belle that night, for her spirit was pitched to a height of joy and triumph that charged her whole being with a powerful magnetism. Possibly with a presentiment that it was to be an isolated experience, she abandoned herself recklessly to the mere delight of living, her will imperious for the fulness of one of the dearest of girlhood's ideals. She was one of those women, cast, as she well knew, for tragic and dramatic contacts with life, but Nature in compensation had granted her a certain wildness of spirit that sprang spontaneously to meet the pleasure, trifling or great, of the mere present;

no matter for how long a period, or how hard, its wings had been smitten.

So she danced, and talked far more than was her wont, surpassing herself in every way, and no more interested in poor Hexam than in twenty others. He took her in to supper, however, and after three hours of dancing she was glad to rest and be sheltered by his determined bulk, planted squarely before her corner. She knew that she had a coronet very close to her footstool, and that this brilliant night might be but the prologue to a lifetime of the only society in the world worth while, but she was not conscious of any desire beyond the brimming cup of the moment. Moreover, she had never so thoroughly enjoyed being a girl, and love-making would have bored her grievously.

The duke claimed her, and after a desultory tour of the great reception-rooms and an infinite number of little cabinets, containing some of the most valuable of the Japanese and Indian treasures, he led her to the library, a luxurious room conducive to rapid friendship.

With that amiable desire, peculiar to the kindly Englishman, to gratify the ingenuous curiosity of the American, he produced a huge leather volume containing the various patents of nobility that marked the upward evolution of his house from a barony in some remote period of the world's history to the present dukedom, and the royal letters that had accompanied them. It was something he never would have dreamed of doing for a stranger of his own country, or of any state in Europe, but the English humor Americans that please them much as they would engaging children; and Isabel's eyes sparkled with so lively an intelligence that the duke fancied she had literary

intentions and might one day find such information useful. He even showed her his complicated coat-of-arms, which included a bend sinister, for he had royal blood in his veins; and this slanting rod interested Isabel as deeply as the moat under the window. She was even more interested in the duke's attitude; it was evident that he felt no more vanity in his royal descent than deprecation of its irregular cause and enduring emblem. It was, and that was the end of it; but he had quite enough imagination to appreciate the effect of so picturesque an incident in family history upon the mind of the young republican.

"The best we can do is to descend irrelevantly from Washington, Hamilton, or Jefferson," said Isabel. "Only we have not yet reached the stage where we dare to acknowledge it on our coat-of-arms. The illusions of the American youth must be preserved. Even the fact that one of our Presidents was a son of Aaron Burr is still to be read only in the great volume of unwritten history. My father was a sort of walking edition of that work."

"That is new to me!" The duke was quite famous as a student of history, and took a personal interest in America, having been over twice in search of big game. He asked her many questions; but his interest in the general subject was as nothing to the enthusiasm she aroused by a chance allusion to the chicken-ranch. The duke was agricultural above all things; he had a model estate bristling with scientific improvement. He was enchanted at Isabel's picture of her wire-enclosed "runs" and yards containing industrious chickens of all ages, engaged, however innocently, in the pursuit of wealth. Isabel, when she chose, could invest any subject with glamour, and her account, delivered in tones notably accelerated, of the

snow-white, red-crowned flocks, their aristocratic little white mansions, the luxurious nurseries for the "chicks," and the astonishing and costly banquets with which they were daily regaled, was so lively that the duke vowed he would raise Leghorns forthwith. He asked her so many practical questions, taking copious notes, and inevitably embracing California ranch life in its entirety, in his thirst for knowledge, that Isabel had no more dancing that night; but she made an enduring impression upon the eminently practical mind of her host.

It was quite two hours after supper, and Isabel was beginning to reflect with some humor upon the brevity of all illusions, when Hexam and Miss Thangue appeared simultaneously and announced that the Capheaton guests were leaving. Hexam looked sulky and suspicious. Flora was smiling.

"For the first time—" she murmured.

Isabel and the duke laughed outright, and then shook hands warmly.

"When I go home we can correspond," she said to him, "and I will tell you all the new kinks. We are always improving."

"The duke looked positively rejuvenated," said Hexam, spitefully, as they walked down the corridor. "Have you discovered the elixir of life in California, and promised him the prescription."

"No," said Isabel, demurely. "I have merely been initiating him into the mysteries of raising Leghorns."

Hexam looked stupefied, but Miss Thangue burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"Isabel!" she exclaimed. "I begin to suspect you are a minx!"

And Isabel laughed, too, in sheer excess of animal spirits and gratified vanity. She had excellent cause to remember the ebullition, for it was some time before she laughed again.

The duchess, with her light sweet smile, her old-fashioned Book-of-Beauty style, a certain affectation of shabbiness in her black-and-silver gown, looked a more indispensable part of the picture than any of her guests, as she stood in the middle of the great drawing-room with a group of her more intimate friends. Among them was Lady Victoria, more normal of mood this evening, sufficiently gracious, superbly indifferent, although she had held her court as usual.

She tapped Isabel lightly on the cheek with her fan. "You were quite the rage," she said. "I never should have forgiven you if you had not been." And Isabel had not the slightest doubt of her sincerity.

The duchess, in the immensity of her castle, did not pretend to keep an eye on any one, and would have been the last to suspect that Miss Otis had inspired her husband with a sudden passion for chickens. She shook hands approvingly with the young American and asked her to come over informally to luncheon on the morrow.

"Is your head turning?" asked Miss Thangue, as they drove home. "You must reap the results of your success; it would be a pity not to. After a few weeks here with Vicky you must go on a round of visits and then have a season in London."

"It would be glorious!" exclaimed Isabel, in whom problems were moribund. "I certainly believe I shall."

She was in the second of the carriages to reach Capheaton, and Gwynne, who was still standing on the steps,

helped her down, and asked her pleasantly if she had enjoyed herself.

"I had such a good time I know I sha'n't sleep a wink for twenty-four hours. I believe I'll go to the library and get a book of yours I began on Sunday—only—" She hesitated. A talk with this enigmatical cousin would be a proper climax to the triumphs of the night. She raised her eyes, full of flattering appeal. "There are one or two points I did not quite understand—I have hesitated to go on—"

He too was wakeful, and rose to the bait promptly. "Suppose you give me an hour by the empty hearth. Will you? Well, go on ahead and I'll follow in a moment—after I see that the men have all they want in the smoking-room."

In the depths of the most independent woman's soul is a lingering taint of servility to the lordly male, and in Isabel it warmed into subtle life under the flattering response of this illustrious specimen. She fairly sailed towards the library, wondering if any of the famous old-time California belles, Concha Argüello, Chonita Iturbe y Moncada, with their caballeros flinging gold and silver at their feet, Nina Randolph and Chonita Hathaway and Helena Belmont, with their pugnacious "courts," had ever felt as exultant as she. That last moment, as she stepped lightly over the threshold of the library, was a sort of climax to the intoxication of youth.

And then she stopped short, stifling a cry of terror. The library, except for the wandering moonshine, was unlit, but a ray fell directly across a shadowy figure in the depths of a chair, half-way down the room. It was a relaxed figure, the head fallen on the chest; the arms were hanging limply over the sides of the chair, the hands ghastly in the

moonlight. At the rustle of skirts the figure slowly raised its head, and the eyes of a man, haunted rather than haunting, looked out of a drawn and livid face. But the movement was not followed by speech, and Isabel stood, stiff with horror, convinced that she was in the presence of the Capheaton ghost. Of course, like all old manor-houses, it had one, and she was too imaginative not to accept with her nerves if not with her intelligence this ugly proof of a restless domain beyond the grave. But her petrifaction was mercifully brief. There was a quick step behind her, and then an exclamation of horror as Gwynne shot past and caught the lugubrious visitant by the shoulder.

"Good God, Zeal!" he cried, and his voice shook. "What is it, old man? You look—you look—"

The man in the chair rose slowly and drew a long breath, which seemed to infuse him with life again.

"I probably look much as I feel," he said, grimly. "I'm about to go on a journey, and if you can give me a few minutes—"

He paused and looked with cold politeness at Isabel. She waited for no further formalities, but shaken with the sure foreboding of calamity, turned and fled the room.

XIV

THAT night had also been one of triumph for Elton Gwynne. He had dined at the castle, and—his Julia having flitted to another country-house—spent the greater part of the evening in the smoking-room with half a score of the most eminent men in political England; and others whose recognition was not to be despised.

As there were many guests at the castle the dinner took place in the banquet-hall, but at six or eight round tables, and Gwynne had found himself distinguished above all the other young men present by being seated at that of the duchess. The prime-minister, the chancellor of the exchequer, two other members of the cabinet, and an ambassador were his companions. All the women were of exalted station, but for this fact Gwynne cared nothing, being entirely free of that snobbery which so often agitates even the best-born of the world; indeed, would have been resentful of the ripe age of the ladies—accumulated with their political values—had it not been for the tremendous compliment paid to his personal achievement.

He could not sit beside her grace in that nest of titles, but at the suggestion of the duke he had been placed as nearly opposite her as the round table permitted, and he soon forgot the broken circle of immemorial bosoms in the manifest disapproval of the Conservative premier towards himself, and in the attitude of the other men, which,

whether hostile or friendly, evinced a recognition of the rising star and a tolerance of his ideas.

There is always a glamour about a very young man who has given cumulative evidence of genius and compelled the attention of the world, always distrustful of youth. His enemies had long since—and he was but thirty—admitted his gift for letters, fiercely as they might scoff at his conclusions; and his rewards for bravery in the field had aroused no adverse comment. But while his most persistent critics had never discovered him truthless and corruptible, his political sincerity had been called into question even by his colleagues, and almost unanimously by the opposition. His principles were by no means so rigidly outlined as those of the great Whig families, nor of the men who belonged to the Liberal party as a natural result of their more modest station and protesting spirit. He was strong on the fundamental principles of the party, and far more energetic in his advocacy of the rights and needs of the working-man than any Liberal of his own class, but he rarely, if ever, alluded to the question of Home Rule; a question somnolent but by no means dead; and the omission savored of Unionism, in spite of his avowed scorn of all compromises.

These facts, taken in connection with the pride and arrogance of the young scion of the house of Strathland and Zeal, generated the suspicion that he had allied himself with the Liberal party for two reasons only: its weakness in first-class men, and his passion for self-advertising. No one disputed his preëminence in this branch of industrial art, for although he never descended to commonplace methods, and the interviewer, far from being sought, rather dreaded him than otherwise, there was no man in

England who was such a mine for "copy," nor of a perennially greener growth in the select front lawn of "news." When he attacked the government he was eminently quotable, and this endeared him to both reporters and editors. When he was interviewed, fearsome in manner as he was, he sent the worm away packed with ideas and phrases. But although he was almost continuously on the tongue, and the object of more acrimonious discussion than any young man in England, distrust of him had grown to such proportions that he had been dropped after one brief sojourn in the House; and to regain his seat had taken two years of the hardest and most brilliant fighting Great Britain had seen since the Conservative majority of 1874 permitted Disraeli to rest on his prickly laurels. But this memorable battle of one young man against a mighty phalanx of enemies and doubting friends had battered down the prejudices of his own party, and won a meed of applause from even those of stout old Tory principles. The humbler class, upon whom the election largely depended, were captivated by his eloquence, his insidious manipulation of the best in their natures, filling them with a judicious mixture of ideals and self-approval; while the phenomenon he invariably presented on the platform of the gradual awakening into life of a warm-blooded generous magnetic and earnest inner man, so effectually concealed at other times within a repellent exterior, never failed to induce in them the belief that something responsive in their own personalities awakened that rare spirit from its stifled sleep. That the glamour of his birth and condescension to their plane had aught to do with the dazzling quality of his charm, they might have admitted had their minds been driven by the enemy into the regions

of self-analysis, but in any case he was the theme of two-thirds of the "pubs" and reading-rooms in England. He had achieved a sweeping victory that loomed portentously as a forerunner of greater triumphs in the future; for the personal popularity he had achieved, the gift for leadership he had demonstrated, the self-control he showed at all times, and the fatally adhesive quality of his biting wit, had strengthened the Liberal party and caused the Conservative to wish that he had never been born.

And flushed with self-love and the conquest of the woman of his desire, he had never talked better than on that night at Arcot; nor less offensively, for his arrogance and assertiveness were tempered by the warm high tide of his emotions. It was a magnificent room, the banquet-hall at Arcot, as large as that of many royal palaces, hung with old Gobelins and frescoed by a pupil of Giotto. It was a fit setting for the triumphant hour of the "most remarkable young man since the younger Pitt," a phrase which, if not notably suave, at least possessed an astonishing vigor, and was almost as familiar in American and continental newspapers as in his own proud nation; a nation always so keen to possess the first in all departments of excellence—creating them out of second-class material when the first is lacking—that the wonder was she had been so long accepting Elton Gwynne. Nothing, perhaps, but a noble desire for a really great man restrained her.

Opposite Gwynne, the duchess, sweet and tactful, if little more than an ornamental husk in which the juices of her race possibly recuperated to invigorate the future generations, was as fair and stately as her castle demanded; and if her gown was shabby her jewels were not. On

either side of her table, which occupied the central position in the great room, were some of the most beautiful women in England, the smartest, the most politically important; all, without exception, of an inherited status that brought them once a year as a matter of course within the sternly guarded portals of Arcot. Gwynne did not know that Mrs. Kaye had knocked at these sacred portals in vain; for such gossip, if by chance he heard it, made no impression upon him whatever. But he was by no means insensible to the salient fact that he was one among the chosen of Earth to-night, and that it was good to be the hero of such an assembly.

For that he was the hero there was no manner of doubt, and when the dinner was over he spent but half an hour in the drawing-room, preferring the conversation of the heads of state, who so seldom gratified the vanity of a man of his years, but whom he had the power to interest whether they approved of him or not. He had many friends among women, some conquered by the magic of notoriety, others, like Flora Thangue, sensible of his finer side, or tolerant of him through life-long intimacy; and there were times when he was as alive to the pleasures of their society as any young sprig about town; but to-night their admiration was too illogical to administer to the self-love which in the last few days had palpitated with so exquisite a sense of fruition. Moreover, it gave him the keenest satisfaction to read in the manner of these older and long-tried men the grudging belief in his own sincerity.

In reality his motives for joining a party at war with every tradition of his house had been, primarily, as mixed as are all motives that bring about great voluntary changes in

a man's life. It was quite true that he was inordinately ambitious, that he had a distinct preference for the sensational method, as productive of speedier results; for he had no intention of waiting until middle-age for the activities and honors he craved in his insatiable youth; and it was also true that he was even more of an aristocrat than many of his class, with whom a simpler attitude had become the fashion, even if it were not marrow-deep. But the ruling motive had been his passionate love of battle, a trait inherited perhaps from his pioneer ancestors, whose roots were in the soil. This desire to prove his mettle and fill his life with the only excitement worthy of his gifts, would alone have made him turn from the broad ancestral paths, but, like a lawyer fascinated by his brief, he had long since been heart and soul with the party he had chosen, and, with the exercise of his faculties, become possessed of a mounting desire not only to be of genuine use to his country, but to lift the family name from the comparative obscurity where it had rested during the half of a century.

The present head of the family had been an invalid in his early life, and Italy had withered whatever ambitions may have pricked him in his youth. When he finally found himself able to live the year round in England he saw no fault in a nation so superior to any of his exile, and he had settled down to the life of a country squire, devoted to sport, and supremely satisfied with himself. His eldest son, an estimable young man, who had worked at Christ Church as if he had been qualifying for a statesman or a don, died of typhoid-fever before the birth of his boy. The present heir, brilliant, weak, cynical, absolutely selfish, had rioted to such an extent that he had fatally injured his health and incurred the detestation of his grandfather;

Lord Strathland was not only a virtuous old gentleman but was also inclined to be miserly. The subjects upon which they did not quarrel bitterly every time they met were those relating to Elton Gwynne, whom both loved, in so far as they loved any one but themselves. Deeply as they disapproved of his politics, they respected his independence and were inordinately proud of him. Zeal's daughters, who bored him inexpressibly, were parcelled out among relatives, and he led a roving life in search of beneficent air for his weary lungs. All women had become hateful to him since he had been forced to sit in the ashes of repentance, but he had consented to enter upon a second marriage through the most disinterested sentiment of his life, his love of his cousin, whose haunting fear of being shelved in his youth had been poured into his ears many times. That he also enraged his grandfather, who wanted nothing so much as the assurance that his favorite should inherit the territorial honors of his house, may have given zest to his act of renunciation. Not that he had the least intention of giving his cousin a solid basis for despair for many years to come, for no mother ever nursed her babe more tenderly than he his weak but by no means exhausted chest. During his last interview with Elton in London he had assured his anxious relative that he was taking the best of care of himself, and that, in spite of blood-shot eyes and haggard cheeks, his disease was quiescent; although he had decided to start for Davos or some other popular climate before the advent of harsh weather. Davos is a word of hideous portent in English ears, but Gwynne had expelled it with all other cares from his mind, and on this night when he returned from Arcot feeling a far greater man than any of his house had ever

dreamed of being, and with a song in his heart, the awful face of his cousin, whom in the shock of the moment he thought stricken with death, gave him the first stab of terror and doubt that he had experienced in his triumphant life.



XV

"COME up-stairs," said Zeal. "We are liable to interruption here."

"Have they put you up decently?" asked Gwynne, with his mind's surface. "The house is rather full."

"I shall leave by the seven-o'clock train, and it must be three now. I have no intention of going to bed."

"Is that wise? You look pretty seedy, old man. You haven't had a hemorrhage?" He almost choked as he brought the word out, and yet he was not in the least surprised when Zeal replied, tonelessly, "I had forgotten I ever had a chest;" for his mind was vibrating with a telepathic message which his wits attacked fiercely and without avail.

As they entered his room he pushed his cousin into an easy-chair and turned up the lamp on the writing-table. Then he planted his feet on the hearth-rug with a blind instinct to die standing.

"Fire away, for God's sake," he said. "Something has happened. You know you can count on me, whatever it is."

Zeal, who was sitting stiffly forward, his hands gripping the arms of his chair, laughed dryly. "You will be the chief sufferer. The others don't count."

"Has my grandfather speculated once too often? Are we gone completely smash?" Gwynne was rapidly as-

suring himself that he was now prepared for the worst, that nothing should knock the props from under him again, that it was the sight of Zeal's face that had upset him; he was not one to collapse before the stiff blows of life.

"It is likely. Anyhow, if he lives long enough he'll make a mess of what is left." He raised his head slowly, and once more Gwynne, as he met those terrible haunted eyes, felt as Adam may have felt when he was being bundled towards the exit of Eden. He braced himself unconsciously, and after Zeal's next words did not relax his body, although his lips turned white and stiff.

"I am going to kill myself some time to-day," said Zeal, in a voice so emotionless that Gwynne wondered idly if all his capacity for expression had gone to his eyes. "I should have done it several hours earlier, but I felt that I owed you an explanation. You can pass it on to my grandfather when the time comes."

He paused a moment, and then he too seemed to brace himself.

"I killed Brathland," he said.

Gwynne moistened his lips. "Poor old Zeal," he muttered. "It must be a horrid sensation—"

"To be a murderer? I can assure you it is."

Gwynne's mind seemed to darken until only one luminous point confronted it, the visible tormented soul of his kinsman. He walked over to the table and mixed two tumblers of whiskey-and-soda, wondering why he had not thought of it before. They drank without haste, and then Gwynne took the chair opposite Zeal's.

"Tell me all about it," he said.

"Brathland and I had not been friends for some years. He was a bounder, and an ass in the bargain. I never,

even when we were on speaking terms, made any particular effort to hide what I thought of him—it wasn't worth while. Of course, with every mother firing her girls at his head, and the flatterers and toadies from whom a prospective duke cannot escape if he would, he had an opinion of himself that would have made me the object of his particular rancor, even if I hadn't cut him out with three different women that couldn't marry either of us. When I got the verdict that I must pull up or go under, he chose that particular moment to take up with Stella Starr, the only woman I ever cared a pin for. Somehow, he got wind of my condition, and knowing that I would prefer to retire as gracefully as possible, it struck him as the refinement of vengeance to make a laughing-stock of me when I was no longer in a condition to play the game out; to advertise me as a worn-out rake for whom the world of Stella Starrs had no further use. We never spoke again until Friday night."

He paused, then mixed and drank another whiskey-and-soda, lit a cigarette, and resumed.

"I had objected to his being let into the mine, which Vanneck's agent and private letters had persuaded the rest of us would make our fortunes; but I was helpless, for he was not only Vanneck's cousin, but his brother is out in Africa and also interested in the mine. I therefore consented to attend the dinner at which the whole business was to be discussed, fully intending to treat him as I should any stranger to whom I had just been introduced.

"At first all went well enough. We had the private dining-room and smoking-room on the second floor at the Club, the dinner was excellent, and Brathland, although nearly opposite me, behaved as decently as he always did

when sober. It was champagne that let loose the bounder in him, and that was one reason I always so thoroughly despised him: the man that is not a gentleman when he is drunk has no right to be alive at all.

"We were not long discussing the mine threadbare, for we did not know enough about it to enlarge into any picturesque details, and the agent, who had seen each of us separately, was not present. Raglin read a personal letter from Vanneck, and Brathland another from Dick. Then, the subject being exhausted long before we reached the end of dinner, we drifted off to other topics; and went into the smoking-room with the coffee.

"It was at least six years since I had tasted anything stronger than whiskey-and-water, and what devil entered into me that night to drink a quart of champagne, and liqueurs, and pour port and brandy on top, the devil himself only knows. Perhaps the old familiar sight of a lot of good fellows; most likely the vanity of forcing Brathland to believe that he beheld a rival as vigorous and dangerous as of old—I had gained ten pounds and was looking and feeling particularly fit. At all events the mess affected me as alcohol never had done in even my salet days, and although my thoughts seemed to be moving in a crystal procession, I became slowly obsessed with the desire to kill Brathland; whose face, chalky white, as it always was when he was drunk—and he always got drunk on less than any one else—filled me with a fury of disgust and hatred. My mind kept assuring this thing that straddled it that I had not the least intention of making an ass of myself; and that procession of thought, in order to support its confidence, entered into an argument with my conscience, which was in a corner and looked like a codfish standing



on its tail and grinning impotently. A jig of words escaped from the mouth of the codfish: copy-book maxims, Bible admonitions, the commandments, legal statutes; all in one hideous mess that annoyed me so I slipped out, went up to my room, and pocketed a pistol. That logical procession of thought in my mind assured me that this unusual move at a friendly business dinner was merely in the way of self-protection, for Brathland had once been heard to say that he wished we were both cow-boys on an American ranch so that he could put a bullet into me without taking the consequences—he never had a brain above shilling shockers. My thoughts, as they visibly combined and recombined in the crystal vault of my skull, asserted confidently that he had been reading such stuff lately, and that, ten to one, he had a pistol in his pocket.

"When I returned Brathland was standing by the hearth, supporting himself by the chimney-piece. The rest were lying about in long chairs, smoking, and drinking whiskey-and-sodas. They were all sober enough, and Brathland looked the more of a beast by contrast.

"I took a chair opposite him and ordered my thoughts to arrange themselves in phrases that should pierce his mental hide and wither the very roots of his self-esteem—his vanity was the one big thing about him. But he took his doom into his own hands and built it up like a house of cards.

"'How does it feel to be drunk once more?' he asked, with his damnable sneer. 'It makes you look less of a hypochrondriac, anyhow. "Granny Zeal"—that's what the girls call you.'

"'If they do I've no doubt you taught them,' I replied, in tones as low as his own. Several men were seated not far off, but neither of us hung out a storm signal.

"'I did,' he said. 'Not but that I had had revenge enough. I had made you ridiculous—you with your damned superior airs—like that infant phenomenon cousin of yours who is making the family ass of himself over Julia Kaye—'

"Those were his last words. I pulled the pistol and fired straight into his abdomen—knew I couldn't miss him there.

"God! what a commotion there was. He doubled up with a yell—just like him. The men fairly bounded out of their chairs. There were two waiters in the room—just come in with Apollinaris. Raglin slammed the doors to, and, while Ormond and Hethrington laid Brathland out on a sofa, asked the servants if they would hold their tongues until it was known whether he would die or not. They assented readily enough, knowing how damned well worth their while it was. Then he went off for a surgeon —didn't dare telephone—went straight for a young fellow named Ballast he happened to know, and asked him if he would probe for a bullet and call it appendicitis, for a thousand pounds. Apparently there was no time wasted in argument, for he returned in half an hour with his man. The surgeon probed for the bullet, but without success. Then he bandaged Brathland, had him carried up to Raglin's room, and sent for a nurse that he could trust.

"We all regathered in the smoking-room, shut the waiters in the dining-room, and talked the matter over. By this time I was more hideously sober than I ever had been in my life. What they thought of me I neither knew nor cared, and it is doubtful if they knew themselves; their one thought was to keep the matter from getting out and dragging the Club into a scandal; and of course Raglin was equally keen on sheltering the family, whether Brath-

land lived or died. Anyhow, I fancy they would have stood by me, for if we have no other virtue we do stand by each other.

"Practically the only question was the amount to be paid in blackmail, for every trace of the affair had been removed; even the smell of antiseptics and ether had gone. We finally called the waiters in and offered them four hundred each for their silence, or in the case of Brathland's death—the surgeon held out hopes—a thousand. They coolly replied they would take a thousand apiece before noon on the following day, and ten thousand each in case of death. We—or rather Raglin and one or two others—jawed for an hour; but the wretches never yielded an inch. They had us on the hip and were not likely to be put off by any amount of eloquence. Of course we caved in and God knows what amount of future blackmail the Club is in for. Then there was the thousand for the surgeon, and the nurse would expect a thousand more. Of course I made myself responsible for the entire amount. Raglin insisted for a time upon going halves—blood may be blood, but he had despised Bratty as much as I ever did—but of course I would not hear of it.

"The next afternoon the surgeon probed again, and Brathland died under the ether. The wound after probing looked sufficiently like an ordinary incision to deceive any one. Raglin and Harold Lorcutt—who, of course, was told the truth—naturally had the body sealed up in lead before taking it north. The old duke and the women of the family are in a fair way to know nothing."

He paused abruptly and lifted his eyes once more to Gwynne's, bursting into a laugh that sounded like the crackling of fire under dry leaves.

"Lovely story, ain't it?"

But Gwynne made no reply. His mind, released, was working abnormally, and his face was as livid as his cousin's had been.

Zeal rose. The narrative had excited him out of his apathy and physical exhaustion, the confession shaken the rigidity from his mind. He planted himself on the hearth-rug with an air that approached nonchalance. His thin clever face had a burning spot on either cheek, his sunken eyes were no longer haunted, but brilliant and staring; his thin high nose and fine hands twitched slightly, as if his nerves were enjoying a too sudden release.

"Heavenly sensation—to be a murderer. What beastly names things have and how we are obsessed by them! The word rings in my brain night and day—I haven't slept three hours since it happened, and I never had the remotest hope that he would live. It's the second time in my life I've been up against a cold ugly fact that stands by itself in a region where rhetoric doesn't enter. I believe I could tolerate the situation if I'd done it in cold blood, if I'd thought it out, determined to gratify my hatred of the man; if, in short, the deed had been the offspring of my intelligence, for which I have always had a considerable respect. But to have been under the control of a Thing, like any navvy, to be a criminal without the consent of my will—

"I don't know that that fact alone would make life insupportable. But there are other and sufficient reasons. I shall never get the hideous sight of Brathland as he doubled up, and his horrid gurgling shriek, out of my mind this side of the grave. And I am practically cleaned out. You know how much I have left of my mother's property!

It barely covers what I paid out to-day. There isn't a penny for the girls. They will be dependent on Strathland —as I should be if I lived; a position for which I have as little relish as for that of a murderer on the loose. And should I ever be really safe? If this stinking quartet takes it into its head to levy annual blackmail, where is the money coming from? I won't have the others let in while I'm alive. If it did come to that—and of course it would—I'd get out anyhow, so I may as well go now and save myself further horrors. Besides, with all our precautions, we may have overlooked some significant detail, there may have been an eavesdropper, the undertakers may have had their suspicions—for all I know I may be arrested to-morrow—well, Jack, what would you do in my place?"

Gwynne shook himself and stood up. "I don't know. I have been feeling as if I had killed Bratty myself. But I cannot imagine myself committing suicide—talk about ugly words! In the first place I don't think that one crime is any reason for committing another, and in the second—"

"It is cowardly! You don't suppose that old standby slipped my mind, do you? Well, I am a coward. There you have my dispassionate opinion of myself. I don't see myself in the prisoner's dock, in the graceful act of dangling from the end of a rope; or, if the judge was inclined to have pity on the family, of dying in a prison hospital. Even if I trumped up the necessary fortitude I should be a blacker villain than I am to bring disgrace upon my five poor girls and the woman that has promised to marry me, to say nothing of Vicky and yourself. Nor, on the other hand, do I see myself skulking in some hole abroad with the hue and cry after me. I have just as little

appetite for the rôle of the haunted man in comparative security. Well, what would you do yourself?"

Gwynne shuddered. His own eyes were hunted. "How, in God's name, can any man tell what he would do until he is in the same hole? I should like to think that I would speak out and take the consequences. There is little danger of your swinging, and as for imprisonment—one way or another you've got to answer for your crime, and it seems to me that the honest thing is to accept the penalty of the law you live under."

"Well, it doesn't to me," said Zeal, coolly, and lighting another cigarette. "I asked the question merely out of curiosity, as the workings of your mind always interest me. But I have quite made up my own mind. The only reason I hesitated a moment—to be exact, it was half a day—was on your account. Of course I know what my death will mean to you."

"It was for that reason I was almost coward enough not to remonstrate." Gwynne scratched a match several times before he succeeded in getting a light. "Nevertheless, I meant it."

"Don't doubt it. And I am sorry—it is about the only regret I shall take with me, that and some remorse on account of the girls. I suppose Strathland will throw them a bone each—"

"I will look out for them. But you are not bent on this horror!" he burst out. Wild plans of drugging his cousin, of locking him up, chased through his mind, and at the same time he was sick with the certainty of his own impotence. He knew his cousin, and he had the sensation that an illuminated scroll of fate dangled before his eyes.

Zeal nodded. His excitement, his fears, had left him.



He felt something of the swagger in calm peculiar to the condemned in their final hour, that last great rally of the nerves to feed the fires of courage. He finished his cigarette and flung himself on the sofa.

"Wake me at twenty to seven, will you?" he asked. "I have ordered the trap."

XVI

THE young Marquess of Strathland and Zeal sat alone in the smoking-room at Capheaton—the guests, with the exception of Flora Thangue and Isabel Otis had departed six days ago—sunk in a melancholy so profound that his brain was mercifully inactive: if the history of the past week was dully insistent the future was not.

He had witnessed the descent of his grandfather and cousin into the vault of the chapel at Strathland Abbey two days before, and after the necessary interviews with stewards and family solicitors had returned this afternoon to Capheaton with his mother. Lady Victoria, even her dauntless soul sick with grief and horrors, had gone to bed at once, and after a funereal dinner, where he had made no response whatever to the feeble efforts of the girls to illuminate the darkness in which he moved, had gone to the smoking-room alone, wishing to think and plan, yet grateful that he could not.

He had known nothing of the weakness of his grandfather's heart, and the old gentleman, as ruddy and debonair as ever, had just come in from the coverts when he arrived at the Abbey a few hours after Zeal's departure from Capheaton. Always vain of his health and appearance since his complete recovery, now many years ago, Lord Strathland had turned a haughty back upon the one physician that had dared to warn him; not even his

valet was permitted to suspect that he had been forced to pay to Time any debt beyond bleaching hair and an occasional twinge of gout. The care he had taken of himself in his delicate youth had given him a finer constitution than he would have been likely to enjoy had he been able to go the wild way of many of his family; and it was his familiar boast that he intended to live until ninety.

Elton's visit roused no curiosity in his complacent breast, for the favorite seldom announced his coming, and it was quite in order that he should run down for congratulations, and delight his affectionate if disapproving relative with personal details of the great fight. He had come with the intention of being the one to break the news of his cousin's death to his grandfather, should it be necessary; but he permitted himself to hope that Zeal would rise above his type. He had driven him to the station himself, dispensing with the groom as well, and pleaded with him to wait at least a month; to consider the matter more coolly and carefully than had hitherto been possible; begged him to return to Capheaton; offered to travel with him if he preferred to leave England. Whatever might threaten in the future there could be no immediate danger of arrest, for if the shot had carried beyond the private rooms of the Club there would have been evidence of the fact at once, and if the undertakers had suspected the truth and delayed giving information, their purpose was blackmail and could be dealt with.

And while he argued and pleaded he wondered, as he had during the hours he watched beside his cousin sleeping, if, in spite of certain principles which he had believed to be immutable, he could have found any other solution himself. Honor has many arbitrary inflections, and

Zeal's act, being wholly abominable, there must seem, in his code, to be no place for him among men. To walk among them unscathed, punished only by a conscience that time would inevitably dull, and the loss of a small fortune that his promised wife would more than replace, while some passionate creature without powerful friends or money for blackmail went to the noose, was an outrage abroad in the secret regions of the spirit even if it made no assault upon public standards. He deserved extinction, one way or another, and it would be almost as great an outrage were he to cover his family with his own disgrace. Certain men might, after such a lesson, live on to devote their lives to repentance and beneficent works, but not Zeal; and Gwynne had no great respect for a character made over after some terrifying explosion among its baser parts. And the question would always remain if the highest honor would not have commanded confession.

He made a deliberate effort to put himself in Zeal's place, and after several failures accomplished the feat. He was willing to believe that his first impulse would have been to destroy himself, not so much through fear as through a blind sense of atonement, for when he endeavored to argue that the crime belonged to the law and the public, he swore at himself for a prig. Either way was suicide, and if the more deliberate might damn a man's soul, no doubt he deserved nothing less, and at least he had done his duty by his family and his class. Gwynne had in the base of his character a puritanical stratum by no means mined as yet, but with too many outcroppings to have been overlooked. But the very strength it gave him served to confuse the simplicity of the religious instinct; and duty, like the code of honor, endures many interpretations in

complex minds. He was quite sure that ultimately he would have decided with his cold intelligence; and he was equally sure that if he had doggedly determined to conquer life and be conquered by nothing, that the best part of his mental existence would have gone into the grave with his ideals.

Although there was still some confusion in his mind, he kept it out of his words, and as he drove home from the station he was sanguine enough to hope that he had at least dissuaded Zeal from precipitancy; for his cousin, flippant, cynical, appeared to be quite his usual self, and as he nodded from the window of the train bore little resemblance to the demoralized wretch of the night.

Nevertheless, he hastened to his grandfather, for he knew how little the mood of the moment may presage that of an hour hence; although he was reasonably sure that if Zeal lived until the following morning it would be some time before he brought himself to the sticking-point again. He announced to his mother and his guests that it was his duty to spend twenty-four hours with his grandfather, promising to return in time for two hours' shooting on the morrow.

He took for granted that Zeal had gone to London. What then was his foreboding horror when Lord Strathland, as they sat alone at luncheon—the unmarried aunts were visiting—remarked with acerbity:

"Zeal arrived on the train before yours—went straight to his room, giving orders he was not to be called until dinner—has not honored me with so much as an intimation that he was in the house—Where are you going?"

Gwynne had half risen. He sat down hastily.

"I was afraid he might be ill," he replied, coolly. "But doubtless he merely had a bad night and wants sleep."

In a flash he had understood. It was like Zeal's cynicism to die as close to the family vault as possible.

No meal had ever seemed as long as that last luncheon with his grandfather, who promptly dismissed the subject of his detested heir and asked a hundred questions about the campaign. A fierce sense of protecting the two men he loved best enabled Gwynne to answer as collectedly as if he had not been possessed with the sickening idea that the very bones had gone out of him. When luncheon was over he accompanied his grandfather to the library, then after smoking a third of a cigar, left him to his nap, frankly stating that he thought he had better look up Zeal, who had been rather seedy of late; he would risk being unwelcome.

He walked slowly up the stair and along the corridor to his cousin's suite; he was in no hurry to reach it, but neither could he wait for the possible discovery of the servants at the dinner-hour.

He knocked at the door of the sitting-room. There was no answer. He turned the handle. The door was locked. Then he pounded and called. He was about to fling himself against the door when he heard a quick step in the corridor, and before he could retreat Lord Strathland was beside him. There was no defect in the old gentleman's eyesight nor in his perceptions. Zeal's abrupt arrival without servant or luggage, and his more than usual rudeness, had charged him with vague suspicions as well as annoyance. When Gwynne, in spite of his self-control, had turned livid upon hearing that Zeal was in the Abbey, and had risen as if to fly to his rescue, a dark if

undefined foreboding had entered his grandfather's mind. But Lord Strathland respected the reserve of his guests, no matter how nearly related, and, dismissing the subject, had forgotten his apprehension until Gwynne revived it by his untimely pilgrimage. Then Lord Strathland thought the time had come to hear the truth.

"Well?" he demanded, sharply. "What is it? What's up? Why doesn't Zeal open? I saw him in Piccadilly on Saturday and he stared at me as if he had never seen me before. I thought at the moment it was some of his damned impertinence, but concluded that he had something on his mind. He looked more dead than alive."

Gwynne's back was to the light, and he controlled his voice, although his heart was thumping. "Well, he has been, poor chap—awfully seedy—I am really worried. He may have anticipated a final hemorrhage, and crawled home to die." He cherished the hope that Zeal had been at pains to procure an untraceable drug.

"Ah! Well—I hope that is it if the poor fellow is dead. He looked as if he had more than ill-health on his mind. I thought he had pulled up, but no doubt he went to pieces over some wretched woman again. Come, let us get in. I don't want the servants to know anything of this at present."

They threw themselves against the door. The old gentleman was heavy and Gwynne sound and wiry in spite of his delicate appearance. The door was stout but its hinges were old, and after several attempts they drove it in. Lord Strathland's face was pale and he was panting, but he led the way rapidly through the sitting-room into the bedroom.

Zeal had undressed, extended himself on the bed, and

covered his body with an eider-down quilt. Lord Strathland jerked it off, and both saw what they had expected to see, for a faint odor of burnt powder lingered in the rooms.

Lord Strathland's face was ghastly, almost blue. He had anticipated death, not with the imagination of the young, but dully, through the atrophied faculties of his age, and the shock could hardly have been greater had he found his grandson without warning.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, thickly. "You know and I will know."

Gwynne took him firmly by the arm and turned him about. "Not here," he said. "Come to the library. I will tell you, but I am no more fit to talk just now than you are to listen."

His grandfather submitted, and Gwynne dropped his arm and rearranged the quilt over his cousin's body. At the same moment Lord Strathland's eyes lit on a sealed letter addressed to himself. Before Gwynne could interfere he had broken the seal. It ran:

"My Lord,—I murdered Brathland. In cold blood—saving the fact that I was drunk. My entire private fortune has gone for purposes of blackmail. Even that might not have saved me eventually from the hangman, we have grown so damned democratic. All things considered, I am sure you will agree that it is quite proper I should make the exit of a gentleman while there is yet time. Jack will give you further particulars, should you care to listen to them. Zeal."

He too had known nothing of the condition of his grandfather's heart, and it had amused him to plan a last shock

to the perennial optimism and complacency of the person he disliked most on earth. The smile was still on his frozen lips that expressed the amused anticipation of his brain. Death, to do him justice, he had met with none of the cowardice he had vaunted, and consistently with his arid cynical soul.

"Don't read it! Don't!" Gwynne had exclaimed, in agony, and forgetting the awful figure on the bed in his alarm at the sight of his grandfather's face. "If you must know the truth let me tell it in my own way."

But Lord Strathland read, and fell at his feet like a bundle of old clothes.



XVII

GWYNNE wondered if he should ever shake off the pall-like memories of the past week: the testimony before the coroner, in which every word had to be weighed as carefully as if life instead of the honor of the worthless dead were at stake, the reporters from the less dignified of the British newspapers, and the American correspondents, two of whom dodged the vigilance of the servants, entered the Abbey by a window, and took snap shots of the lower rooms and of the coffins in the death-chamber; the painful scenes with the women of the family, who had descended in a body; the wearisome interview with the family solicitor, in the course of which he had learned that he was heir to little more than the entailed properties; which must be let in order to insure an income for his three unmarried aunts, Zeal's five girls, and himself; the hideous reiteration of "your lordship" by the obsequious servants, that reproduced in his mind the slow deep notes of the passing bell, tolled in the village for his grandfather and cousin.

A letter from Julia Kaye had fluttered in like a dove of promise, but he had never been able to recall anything in the six pages of graceful sympathy but her allusions to the dead as "the marquess" and "the earl." He told himself angrily that his brain must have weakened to notice a solecism at such a time, but it is in moments

of abnormal mental strain that trifles have their innings; and during the beautiful service in the chapel he caught himself wondering if any woman of his own class could have made such a slip. Always deaf to gossip, he had no suspicion that his Julia had been laughed at more than once for her inability to grasp all the unwritten laws of a world which she had entered too late. With an ear in which a title lingered like a full voluptuous note of music, she was blunt to certain of the democratic canons of modern society. Although it gave her the keenest pleasure to address the highest bulwarks of the peerage off-handedly as "duke" and "duchess," there had been moments of confusion when she had lapsed naturally into "your grace." And it would have seemed like a lost opportunity to have alluded to a titled foreigner without his "von" or "de," even where there was a more positive title to use as often as she pleased. It was the one weak spot in a singularly acute and accomplished mind.

But of all this Gwynne knew nothing, and he was dully wondering if a great love could be affected by trifles, and if his brain and character were of less immutable material than he had believed, his mental vision still straying through the insupportable gloom of the past week, when he heard a light foot-fall beyond the door. He sprang to his feet, cursing his nerves, and was by no means reassured upon seeing the long figure of a woman, dressed entirely in white, a candle in her hand, approaching him down the dark corridor. He had never given a moment's thought in his active life to psychic phenomena, but he was in a state of mind where nothing would have surprised him, and he had turned cold to his finger-tips when a familiar voice reassured him.

"I am not Lady Macbeth," said Isabel, with a tremor in her own voice, as she entered and blew out the candle. "But I felt like her as I braved the terrors of all those dark corridors and that staircase in my wild desire to talk to a living person. I had arrived at that stage where all your ancestors gibbered at the foot of my bed. Flora has been sleeping with me, but your mother wanted her to-night, and I am deserted."

"What a lot of babies you are!" Gwynne was delighted to wreak his self-contempt on some one else, but glad of the interruption, and unexpectedly mellowed by the sight of a pretty woman after the red noses and sable plumage of the past week. It was true that he had seen Isabel at dinner, but like Flora she had worn a black gown out of respect to the family woe, and he hated the sight of black.

Now she wore a gown of soft white wool fastened at the throat and waist with a blue ribbon; and even her profile, whose severity he had disapproved, having a masculine weakness for pugs, was softened by the absence of the coils or braids that commonly framed it: her hair hung in one tremendous plait to the heels of her slippers.

"I see that you have no more sleep in you than I have," he said. "Let us make a night of it."

It had rained all day and he was suddenly alive to a sense of physical discomfort. He rang and ordered a servant to make a fire and bring the tea-service.

"How did you know I was here?" he asked Isabel, when they were alone again.

"I felt that you were, but I went first to your room and tapped. I was quite capable of waking you up. Thank heaven I summoned the courage to come down. This is delightful."

The fire was crackling in the grate, the water boiling in the big silver kettle. Isabel made his tea almost black, but diluted her own, lest she should be left alone before she too was ready for sleep.

"You have had a beastly time these last days," he said, for he was genuinely hospitable. "I am sorry you did not happen to come a month earlier. Have you seen anything of Hexam? He was going on to Arcot."

"He rode over, or walked over, every day. We should have fallen a prey to melancholy without him, although you may believe me when I assure you that we thought more of you than we did of ourselves. I am your own blood-relation, so I have a right to feel dreadfully sympathetic—may I have a cigarette?"

"What a brick you are to smoke! I don't mind being sympathized with for a change. I have had to do so much sympathizing with others in the last week that I have not had time to pity myself. Even my mother went to pieces, for she was fond of Zeal, poor old chap, and her conscience scorched her because she was always rather nasty to my grandfather—she likes and dislikes tremendously, you know; although to most people she is merely indifferent. But when she dislikes—" He blew the ashes from the tip of his cigarette with a slight whistling sound.

Flora Thangue had extracted all the particulars of the death and suicide from Lady Victoria—who knew nothing, however, of the tragic cause of both—and imparted them to Isabel, whose mind, in consequence, was free of morbid curiosity. She had also read the newspapers. The speculations and veiled hints of the sensational sheets had not interested her, but she had pondered deeply over leaders in the more dignified organs, which had abounded

in comment upon the changed conditions in the meteoric career of the young man who was no longer Elton Gwynne, but a peer of the realm.

"Do you mind it so awfully much?" she asked, after a short silence during which they had both smoked absently and gazed at the fire.

"What?" Gwynne turned the cold surprise of his eyes upon her. "Losing two of the four people I cared most for on earth?"

"Of course not. Being suddenly made a peer and having to begin all over. You never will be called Elton Gwynne again, and you will have as much trouble educating the public up to your new name as if you were emerging from obscurity for the first time."

The words, brutally direct, rolled away the last clouds of his lethargy. He vividly realized that he had been skulking before the closed shutters of his understanding, accepting the new conditions with but the dulled surface of his brain.

Now his naked soul stared at her out of his white face and tortured eyes, and she looked away. She had not believed that he could be racked with feeling of any sort, and it was as if she heard him cry: "Oh, God! Oh, God!" although his lips were silent.

But she did not change the subject.

"I suppose you haven't seen the newspapers," she said. "I cut out all the editorials and paragraphs I thought would interest you. One of the big dailies, I forget which, said that the interruption of your career was a greater political tragedy than Parnell's or Lord Randolph Churchill's.

"Do they say that?" asked Gwynne, eagerly. "Well, God knows, it is a tragedy for me."

"Don't you like being a peer the least little bit? I am too feminine, possibly too American, not to see a certain picturesqueness in a title, especially in such a pretty one as yours; and there is no doubt that you are a more imposing figure in the eyes of the world to-day than you were a week ago. Are you really indifferent to that side of it?"

"Am I? One does such a lot of self-posing and self-imposition. There are few things in this world that gratify a man's vanity more than being a peer of Great Britain, and, no doubt, had I happened to be born without what you might call a fighting ambition, and certain abilities, I should—barring natural grief—feel that I was one of the favorites of destiny—that is to say if I had a commensurate income. The fact that I must let the Abbey and Capheaton, and after portioning off all the unmarried women of the family, shall have barely enough left to keep up my flat in Charles Street, may have something to do with my absence of enthusiasm. But—yes—I *am* sure of myself!" he burst out. "I am the most miserable man on earth to-night, and the reason is not that I have lost two good friends, but because my career is ruined, broken off in the middle."

"You could become a militant Liberal peer."

"Paradoxes don't happen to appeal to me. And the only chance for a genuine fighter is the House of Commons. Besides, it is impossible for a man to be a peer and remain a true Liberal. Power, and inherited influence, and exalted social position have a deadly insinuation. I don't believe any man is strong enough to withstand them. There is never an hour that a peer is not reminded of his difference from the mass of humanity; and human nature is too weak to resist complacency in the end—long before

the end. And complacency is the premature old age of the brain and character. If this tragedy had not occurred, even if my grandfather had lived on for fifteen years more, as there was every reason to believe he would, I might have gone on that much longer before discovering weak points in my character. Now God knows what I shall develop."

"Have you made any plans?"

"Plans? I hadn't faced the situation until you spoke."

"You have weak spots like other people, of course. You would be a horrid prig if you hadn't. But you surely must know if your Liberalism is sincere, ingrained. There is no question that you are a hopeless aristocrat in essentials. But so have been certain of America's greatest patriots—Washington and Hamilton, for instance. I do not see that it matters. One can hold to what seems to me the first principles of advanced civilization—that hereditary monarchy is an insult to self-respecting and enlightened men—without wishing to associate with those that offend grammar and good taste. Education, intellect, breeding, would create an aristocracy among anarchists on a desert island—supposing any possessed them; and in time it would become as intolerant of liberties as if it harked back to the battle of Hastings. There is no plant that grows so rapidly in the human garden as self-superiority, and it is ridiculous only when watered by nothing more excusable than the arbitrary social conditions that exist in the United States. I don't see that the qualities you have inherited should interfere with your ability to see the justice and rationality of self-government."

"They do not!" She seemed to beat his thoughts into their old coherent and logical forms. "Whatever may

have been the various motives that impelled me into the Liberal party in the beginning, there is no question that I have become even more extreme and single-minded than I have let the world know. Perhaps it is my American blood, although I never thought of that before. At all events, had the time been ripe I should have devoted all the gift for leadership I now possess, and all the power I could build up, to overturning monarchy in this country and establishing a republic. There! I never confessed as much to a living soul, but I think you have bewitched me, for I never have been less—or more—myself!"

"With yourself as President?"

"Sooner or later—the sooner the better. But I waste no time in dreams, my fair cousin—although I have something of a tendency that way. It was enough that I had a great and useful career before me and might have gone into history as the prime factor of the great change."

"Well, that is over," said Isabel, conclusively. "There is only one thing left you and that is to come over and be an American."

"What?" He stared, and then laughed. "Ah!"

"You will have all the fighting you want over there. You will have to work twenty times harder than you ever did here, for your accent, your personality, the thirty years you have lived out of the country you were born in, all will be against you. You will have to be naturalized in spite of your birth—I happen to know of a similar case in my father's practice—and that will take five years. In those five years you will encounter all the difficulties that strew the way of the foreigner who would gain the confidence of the shrewd American people—they are most characteristic in the small towns and farming districts.

You will win because you were born to win, but you will learn for the first time what it is to stand and fight absolutely alone—for if they learn of your exalted birth they will but distrust you the more; and you will taste the sweets of real success for the first time in your life. In spite of your youth and enthusiasm, there is in you a vein of inevitable cynicism, for you have had far too much experience of the flatterer and the toady. You are too honest not to confess that if you had been born John Smith there would have been no editorial comments of any sort upon the tragic end of your relatives, and the great world would have taken as little notice of your abilities until you had compelled its unwilling attention by many more years of hard work. America will take you for exactly what you are and no more. But you will have to become more American than the Americans; although you may continue to say 'ain't it' and 'it's me' and drop your final *g*s, because those are all the hall-marks of the half-educated in the United States, and will rather help you than otherwise. Of course you will assume charge of your own ranch, for that will not only give you plenty to do, but it will be the quickest way of becoming one of the people; and after you have been out in all weathers for a year or two, turned a dark brown down to your chest, ridden a loping horse on a Mexican saddle, talked politics on street corners and in saloons, left your muddy or dusty wagon once a week at the Rosewater hitching-rail while you transact business in a linen duster, or yellow oil-skin overalls and rubber boots, you will feel so American—Californian, to be exact—that the mere memory of this formal cut-and-dried Old World will fill you with ennui."

There was a glint of laughter in Gwynne's eyes, but they were widely open and very bright.

"I see! You are determined to make a convert of me. You began the night of your arrival. I suspect you of having come over on a crusade."

"That was the moment of inspiration—that first night. I won't deny that I have thought a great deal about it since—of little else since I read those editorials."

He leaned back and regarded the sole of his shoe as if it were a familiar. "That is a large order," he said, in a moment. "Colossal! There might be worse solutions. And the life of a cow-boy, for a while at least—"

"Don't delude yourself. You would not be the least bit of a cow-boy. You wouldn't even look picturesque—if you did you might be sorry. You would just be a plain northern California rancher. Of course you would have all the riding you wanted, but there are no round-ups worth speaking of on a ranch the size of Lumalitas. And probably you would continue to let sections of it to men that wanted to raise cattle or horses on a small scale. You had better devote yourself to the dairy and to raising hay and grain, and turn about five hundred acres into a chicken-ranch—nothing pays like that."

He threw back his head and laughed as heartily as if death and disaster had never been.

"From the English hustings and the greatest parliamentary body the world has ever known to chickens and butter in California! From Capheaton to Rosewater, oil-skin overalls and a linen 'duster!' Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! But give me a comprehensive idea of the place, in your own inimitable unvarnished diction. That will keep the ghosts off, at all events."

XVIII

JULIA KAYE was one of those women designed by nature for the rôle of a Valérie Marneffe, or of that astute Parisian's bourgeoise and more romantic daughter, Emma Bovary; but tossed, in the gamble of the fates, into a setting of respectable opulence, where her instincts for prey were trimmed of their crudities, and the vehemence of her passions subdued by the opportunity to gratify all other whims and desires.

Her father, born in the sooty alley of a manufacturing town in the north of England, had run away to sea in his boyhood, deserted in the port of New York, starved, stolen, peddled, washed dishes in cheap restaurants, shovelled snow, tramped to Chicago, starved and peddled and shovelled again, finally found a position with a firm of wholesale druggists. He attended a night school, proved himself a lad of uncommon sharpness, and in less than a year was first packing and then dispensing drugs. Five years later he was drawing a large salary, and at the age of thirty he had opened a retail drug store of his own.

It was during his earlier period of comparative leisure and peace of mind that he began to test the inventive faculty that had pricked him in small but significant ways during his boyhood. His first inventions were of a minor importance, although they increased his income and were permanently remunerative; but when he turned the torch

of his genius upon the fatal antipathies of vermin, his success was so deservedly rewarded that he was a millionaire in less than three years. He returned to England, and, avoiding the alley of inglorious memory, courted and won the daughter of a manufacturer, his ambition driving him to compel social recognition in his native city. It soared no higher, but his wife, now no longer one of a large family, but with the income of a generous millionaire at her disposal, was open to higher promptings; and he to conversion. They moved to London and laid their plans with some skill.

But although London can stand a good deal in the cause of resupply and novelty, the violence of Mrs. Tippett's accent, and the terrible solecisms of a gentleman whose education had begun in a Lancashire alley and finished in the business purlieus of Chicago, who had acquired the American vice of brag in its acutest form, and who, when in his cups, shouted and spat and swore, were more than the most enterprising among them had been called upon to endure. The social ambitions of the Tippetts were so definitely quenched that the indignant millionaire threatened to return to Chicago. But Mrs. Tippett moved him firmly to Brighton, where, in the course of time, she toned him down. They made their way slowly into society of a sort, and attracted the attention of the public. There was no law to prevent them from dining at the fashionable hotels, where Paris gowns could not pass unobserved; and their turnouts were irreproachable.

Mrs. Tippet, an astute woman, by this time had realized that hers was not the destiny of the social star, and she concentrated her hopes and ambitions upon her one

child, an uncommonly clever little girl. This child grew up in a luxury that would have stifled even her precocious mind had it not been for the rigid laws of the school-room. Her governesses and tutors were selected with a sharp eye to the number of titles in their reference-books, but dismissed promptly if they were unworthy of their hire. Later, the little Julia was sent to a distinguished school near Paris, where, with an eye to her future well-being, remarkable in one so young, she divided her affectionate affluence among the few whose exalted station made them worth the while of a maiden with an indefinite future.

These friends did not prove as useful as she had hoped. At home there were her parents to terrify theirs, and although she visited at several châteaux, and more than one title was laid at her gilded feet, she made up her mind to read her name in Burke.

She took her parents for a year round the world with a view to studying their lingering idiosyncrasies, and her chance came in India, where she buried them both. The [illegible] and the kindly wife of the [illegible], in whom she had had the forethought to secure a friend, sent for her to come to Simla and remain as her guest until she found courage and a chaperon for the return to England. Here she met Captain, the Honorable Augustus Love, heir to an ancient barony, chivalrous, impecunious, and hard-up. They were married with the blessings of old friends and new, and, to do her full justice, she made him a good wife according to her lights. She was quite insanely in love with him at first, for he looked like one of Ouida's guardsmen, and his pedigree was so long, and so varied with romantic historic episode, that she was fully a week committing it to memory.

When he left the army and they had returned to England—via Paris—she had the wardrobe and establishment of a princess, the right to dine at the Queen's table, and not a relative in London. She was immoderately happy, and during the five years of her wedded life she exhausted the first strength of her affections, buried her feminine caprice, and whatever of impulse youth may have clung to as its right. When Gussy Kaye died, the predominant feeling in her bosom was rage at his inconsiderateness in leaving the world before his father, and nothing behind him but a courtesy prefix which she could not even use on her cards.

She opened her soul to searching, and decided that five years of love were quite enough for any woman, and that her attentions hereafter should be directed towards the highest worldly success obtainable with brains, talents, and wealth. To be merely a rich woman in the right set did not come within measurable distance of her ambition's apex, and she determined to gratify her passionate self-love by becoming a personality.

She had long since simulated the repose of the high-born Englishwoman, until, like all imitators, she far surpassed her models, and her manners were marked not so much by the caste of Vere de Vere as by an almost negative stolidity. This at least provided her with an unruffled front for trying occasions—others besides the Arcots were insensible of her offerings—which in the United States of America would have been admiringly characterized as "nerve." This manner became solidified after her popular husband's death, and if it was generally referred to as "aplomb" or "poise," allowances must be made for the poverty of the average vocabulary.

It is not difficult for a clever, handsome, correct, and wealthy woman to reach and hold a distinctive position even in London, that world's headquarters of individualities. In addition to a judiciously lavish hospitality, it is only necessary to personalize intelligently, and this Mrs. Kaye did with an industry that would have carried her to greatness had she been granted a spark of the divine fire. She cultivated the great and the fashionable in art, letters, and the drama, mixed them tactfully with her titles, attended the banquets of the ruling class in Bohemia attired flatteringly in her best, and founded a society for the study of Leonardo da Vinci. She became intimate with several royal ladies, who were charmed with her endless power to amuse them and her magnificent patronage of their charities; and she formed close relations with other dames but a degree less exalted, and generally more discriminating. She cultivated a witty habit of speech, the society of cabinet ministers, and her *chef* was a celebrity. Her gowns would have been notable in New York, and she was wise enough to avoid eccentricity and openly to regard all forms of sensationalism with a haughty disdain.

Her attitude to men was equally well-advised. Detrimentals and ineligibles never so much as came up for inspection; she had a far-reaching sense of selection and a proper notion of the value of time. Therefore, the many that had the run of her luxurious mansion contributed personally to her prestige, and she flattered herself that her particular band was little less distinguished than the Royal Household. And they invariably found her witty, entertaining, or, like Madame Récamier, ready to listen "avec seduction." Her knowledge of politics was practically unbounded.

In such moments as she happened to be alone with any of her swains, she became distractingly personal, inviting, gently repelling, afforded dazzling glimpses of possibilities awaiting time and the man: so accomplishing the double purpose of agreeably titillating her own depths and wearing the halo of a well-behaved Circe. Altogether her success was what it always must be when brains and ambition, money and a cold heart are allied; but it was small wonder if the head of the daughter of the House of Tippett was a trifle turned and certain of her perceptions were blunted.

Although ofttimes large with complacency, she by no means lost sight of her original purpose to wed a coronet, and if she endured four years of widowhood it was merely because she knew that she could afford to wait for transcendence. This she had finally run to earth in Lord Brathland, imminent heir to a dukedom, and personally more agreeable to her than any man in London. That he was notoriously inconstant but added zest to the chase, and it was, perhaps, the illusion she at times achieved of a certain resemblance to the ladies of his preference that finally overcame his intense aversion from respectability. He had offered himself to her on the day of his undoing.

This was the woman with whom Elton Gwynne was infatuated at the most critical moment of his career. Of her profound aybsses he suspected nothing. She reigned in his imagination as the unique woman in whom intellect and passion, tenderness and all the social graces united in an exquisite harmony. There had been a time when, dazzled by the brilliancy of his ascending star, and Brathland being but a name to her, she had considered marriage with a man who assuredly would be the next leader of a

Liberal House, and was no less certain of being prime-minister. She was under no delusion that she could one day induce him to accept a peerage, but she was reasonably sure that Zeal would not marry again, and there were times when the heir looked so ill that she tightened her bonds about the heir-presumptive, while assuring him that she was too much in love with liberty to think of marriage. Even when Zeal came back from Norway or Sorrento looking almost well, she never permitted Gwynne to escape, to see so much as a corner of her ego that might disturb the image of herself she had created in his mind; and when she met Brathland and her senses swam with the subtle scent of strawberry leaves, she saw no reason for losing the stimulating society and flattering attentions of the brightest star in the political firmament. Therefore, when he was ready to hand, in the crushing hour of her riven ambitions, and his own of serenest effulgence, she promptly reflected that the distance between a marquisate and a dukedom was quickly traversed by a powerful statesman. Meanwhile, although Elton Gwynne would no doubt be a hideous trial as a husband, his wife's position, supported by a million in the funds and another in Chicago, would be one of the most brilliant in England. And she too had seen Lord Zeal in Piccadilly on Saturday.

XIX

THE sudden elevation of her Jack to a marquisate, beside whose roots, gripping the foundations of Britain's aristocracy, and ramifying the length and breadth of its society, the lost dukedom was a mere mushroom, created for a favorite of the last George, and notorious for its *mésalliances*, did not cost Mrs. Kaye a moment's loss of poise. She merely wondered that she had ever questioned her star. People that disliked her found a subtle suggestion of arrogance in her manner, and the slight significant smile on her large firm lips was a trifle more stereotyped. Those that she favored with the abundance of her offerings remembered afterwards that she had never been so brilliant as during the month that followed the announcement of her bethrothal, and attributed the fact to the electrified springs of affection.

Gwynne and she had been invited to the same houses for the rest of the autumn, but he cancelled his engagements while begging her to fulfil hers, as he should be too busy to entertain her were she so sweet as to insist upon coming to Capheaton. This she had not the least intention of doing, for she not only yearned for the additional tribute due to her, but she always avoided long sojourns in Lady Victoria's vicinity, knowing her as a woman of caprice, who often dropped people as abruptly as she took them up. Susceptible to the charm of novelty, so far Mrs.

Kaye had wholly pleased her; but the clever Julia gauged the depths of her future mother-in-law's credulity and kept her distance. With all her reason for self-gratulation, in the depths of her cynical soul she was quite aware of her natural inferiority to the women she emulated in all but their license. That prerogative, with the wisdom that had marked her upward course, she had flagrantly avoided, knowing that the world is complacent only to those that fire its snobbishness, never to those that fan the flame; and while she bitterly envied these women, she never forgot the market value of her own unimpeachable virtue. She could not in any case have been the slave of her passions, but her serenity was sometimes ruffled as she reflected that, in spite of eminence achieved, her caution in this and in other respects branded her in her secret soul as second rate.

But if she tactfully did not insist upon flying to Capheaton, she wrote such charming letters, happily free of solecisms, that Gwynne wondered at his failure to sound the depths of her charm. But he refrained from meeting her, and the reason was that he was slowly working towards a momentous decision, and wished to arm himself at all points before braving her possible disapproval. When he was his cool normal collected self again, he gave way to his impatience to see the woman he had every reason to believe was deeply in love with him. He telegraphed her a peremptory appeal to go up to her house in London, and she was too wise to refuse. It was now October and London quite bearable. She telegraphed to her servants to strip her house of its summer shroud, and returned early on the day of his choice.

It is hardly necessary to state that Mrs. Kaye lived in

Park Lane. She had cultivated half-tones with a notable success, but to symbolize her new estate was a temptation it had not occurred to her to resist. Shortly after her return from India she had bought a large house in the façade of London, and furnished it with a luxury that satisfied one of the deepest cravings of her being, while her admirable sense of balance saved her from the peculiar extravagances of the cocotte.

She had seen Lady Victoria's expressive boudoir at Capheaton, and its mate in Curzon Street, and relieved the envy they inspired in a caustic epigram that happily did not reach the insolent beauty's ear. "These old coquettes," she had lisped, with an amused uplift of one eyebrow. "They surround themselves with the atmosphere of the demi-monde and forget that a wrinkle is as fatal as a chaperon."

The pictures in her own house were as correct as they were costly, and she had no boudoir. She invariably received her guests in the drawing-room, an immense and unique apartment, with a frieze of dusky copies of old masters, all of a size, and all framed in gilt as dim with time. From them depended a tapestry of crimson silk brocade of uncheckered surface. By a cunning arrangement of furniture the great room was broken up into a semblance of smaller ones, each with its group of comfortable chairs, its tea-table, or book case, or cabinet of bibelots, or open hearth. And all exhaled the inviting atmosphere of occupation.

Mrs. Kaye, rested, and more self-possessed than if the hastening lover had been the late Lord Brathland, but agreeably stirred nevertheless, awaited the new peer in a charming corner before a screen of dull gold, the last

reviews on a table beside her, the afternoon sun shining in on her healthy unworn face. When he entered and advanced impetuously across the room she decided that he certainly was a dear, even if he lacked the fascination of Brathland and his kind. And his halo was almost visible. She therefore yielded enchantingly when he enveloped her, smothered her, stormed her lips, and even pulled her hair. She finally got him over to the little sofa—she had advanced to meet him—but remained in his arm, the very picture of tender voluptuous young womanhood. Indeed, she was well pleased, and found her Jack, with that light blazing in his eyes, quite handsome, and fascinating in his own boyish imperious self-confident way.

It was half an hour before she rang for tea, and then she looked so pretty and domestic on the other side of the little table, with its delicate and costly service, that Gwynne was obliged to pause and summon all his resolution before proceeding to another subject that possessed him as fully as herself; but he succeeded, for not even passion could turn him from his course; and she gave him his opening.

"Poor Lord Strathland!" she exclaimed, with a tear in her throat. "He was always so jolly and amusing, quite the most cheerful person I ever met. And before your cousin bécame—lost his health—we were great friends. Indeed he never quite forgot me. But it was for you I was so horribly cut up. I cried for two nights."

"Did you? But I was positive you did not make those tears in your first letter with your hair-brush." He laughed like a happy school-boy, while she protested with a roughish expression that made her look like a very young girl.

"It need not prevent our immediate marriage," he said. "What do you say to the last of this month?"

"I could get ready. Only girls, who never have any clothes, poor things, get trousseaux in these days. I had set my heart upon spending the honeymoon at the Abbey, but it would be rather indecent yet awhile; don't you think so?"

He had not an atom of tact and rushed upon his doom. "We shall have to cut the Abbey," he said, firmly. "I start for California three weeks from to-day."

"Indeed?" she said, stiffly. "I should have thought you would have consulted me. Not but that I shall be enchanted to visit California, but—well, you *are* rather lordly, you know."

"My dear girl, I have been too harassed to consider the amenities. And when a man is rearranging his whole life he must isolate himself or run the risk of clouds in his judgment."

He paused. She disguised her mortification and answered, kindly: "I can understand that in this sudden demand for readjustment you have had many bad moments. It was far too soon for you to go up to the Peers'. But with your marvellous energies, your genius — there is no other word for it—you can soon astonish the world anew with a patent for defossilization. At all events the Peers' will enter upon a new life as a sort of mastodon cave swept out and illuminated by the most energetic and aspiring of knights-errant."

Gwynne laughed dryly. "The rôle does not appeal to me; nor any other in the same setting. I have done a month of the hardest thinking of my life. Everything that went before looks like child's play. I have arrived

at the definite conclusion that my career in England has come to a full stop, and I have made up my mind to create another—out of whole cloth—in the United States."

She stared at him, her face not yet unset, but her eyes expanding with incredulous apprehension. "You mean to desert England?" she asked, quietly.

"Forever. Absolutely. It is all or nothing. I cannot become an American citizen until five years after entering the country, and I do not wish to lose any valuable time. Having made up my mind, I have ceased to wonder if I shall like it. That is now beside the question. I shall drop my title as a matter of course, and hope that I shall pass undiscovered as John Gwynne. In short, I shall begin life all over again—as if I were a criminal in disguise instead of the sport of circumstances. I have ceased to regret the inevitable and begun to be stimulated by the thought of a struggle to which all that I have had here was a mere game, and I am sure that you, with your brains and energy, will enjoy the fight as much as I. I am not going into the wilderness. We shall be only two hours from San Francisco, which I am told is the only city in America that in the least suggests Europe; it should be very attractive. On the ranch you shall have every comfort and luxury. You must be sick of London, anyhow. You have conquered everything here."

He paused and regarded her in some trepidation. In spite of his self-confidence he had had his moments of doubt. And although he had anticipated tears and remonstrance, he was unprepared for the more subtle weapon of amusement, flickering through absolute calm. He suddenly wished that she were younger. He had never given a thought to her age before, but he remembered that



she had lived for two years longer than himself, and it made him feel even less than thirty.

"My dear boy," she said, wonderingly, "I never heard anything so romantic and impossible. Of course it is the American cousin with whom you have been shut up all these weeks that has been putting such preposterous ideas into your head. I always said that nature just missed making you a poet. But if you wish to work out your manifest destiny—to be immortalized in history—you will remind yourself that England is the one place on earth where an Anglo-Saxon can cut a really great figure. Not only because he has the proper background of traditions, but because he has an audience trained to recognize a man's greatness during his lifetime. If you go in for those unspeakable American politics you will never be given credit for anything higher than your medium; in other words, should you develop into a statesman on American lines you would never be recognized for anything but a successful politician. Even if you survived in their hurly-burly of history, you would be judged by contemporary standards—infused with a certain contempt because you were not American-born."

"I have thought it all out. The obstacles to greatness, even more than to success, have whetted my appetite for the struggle. I must fight! fight! fight! I must exercise my powers of usefulness to some good end, and now, now, when I am young and ardent. I should go mad sitting round doing nothing. I have no temper for attacking the passive resistance of inertia. I want to fight out in the open. If I fail I will take my beating like a man. But I have not the least intention of failing. I am acutely aware of the powers within me, and I can use them anywhere."

"Then why not in the Upper House?" she asked, quickly.

"For the reasons I have given you, and because I should fear the results on my character. You know what it means to be a peer of Great Britain. Flattery without accomplishment is demoralizing—would be to me, at all events. It is wine to me when I am achieving, but it would drug me in idleness. Are you so wedded to London?"

"London is the *raison d'être* of life. Has it occurred to you," she asked, gently, "that I might refuse to go to America?"

"I was afraid the idea would be something of a shock, but I was sure you would see the matter in my light."

"It is not wanting in power! But it seems that I am. I have never aspired to the rôle of Amelia Sedley. I have, in fact, rather a pronounced individuality; and yet you have taken upon yourself to dispose of my future as if I were a slip of eighteen—delighted at the prospect of a husband."

"Indeed you are wrong!" he cried, distressed to have bruised so beloved an ego. "But, I repeat, it was a question I was forced to decide alone. Nor would it have been fair to ask you to assume any part of so great a responsibility. Do you suppose I did not think of that? Do you suppose I have ever lost sight of your happiness? Let me think for both and you shall not regret it."

She could have smiled outright at this evidence of the ingenuousness of man, but her breast was raging with a fury of disappointment and consternation. She kept her eyes down lest they should betray her. But suddenly she had an inspiration. She controlled herself with a masterly effort, flooded her eyes with tenderness, raised them, and said, softly:

"I do love London, love it with what I called a passion before I—before we met. And I cannot believe that this extraordinary resolution of yours has had time to mature. Promise me at least that you will not apply for letters of citizenship for at least a year after your arrival—"

"I shall apply the day after I arrive in Rosewater." He steeled himself, for he had had his experience of woman's wiles; and his faith in masculine supremacy as a habit did not waver. "I only regret that the time of probation must be so long. I am on fire to throw myself into the arena—however, there will be opportunities to make myself known and felt. I have decided to study law meanwhile—and the law, it seems, is a career in itself in America."

And then he watched her eyes, fascinated. They slowly hardened, until, with the sun slanting into them, they looked like bronze. She was too intent upon studying his own to hide them, and upon arriving at a final conclusion. She reached it in a moment, for to her habit of rapid thought and her understanding of the workings of the masculine mind she owed no little of her supremacy among the clever women of London.

"I see that your decision is irrevocable," she said. "You are yourself; no one could make or unmake you, and God forbid that I should try. But—and I forbear to lead up to it artistically—I dissever myself from your chariot wheels. I am not afraid of being crushed, for no doubt you would always remember to be polite, if not considerate. I am not sure that you would even permit me to become unrecognizable with dust. But I am no longer plastic. I am thirty-two, and I am as much I as you are you. I shall watch you from afar with great interest, and

I sincerely hope, for both your sakes, that Miss Otis will succeed in marrying you. I cannot fancy anything more suitable."

He had turned white, but he looked at her steadily. He felt as if the round globe were slipping from under him; and vaguely wondered if she had gone about alluding to him as "the marquess." Then he sprang to his feet, lifted her forcibly from her chair, deposited her on the sofa, and taking her in his arms defied her to dismiss him, to live without him. As the body, so yielding before, declined even to become rigid in resistance, he poured out such a flood of pleading that, believing passion had conquered reason, she flung her arms about his neck and offered to marry him on the morrow if he would promise to remain in England. But there was a crystal quality in Gwynne's intellect that no passion could obscure. He merely renewed his pleadings; and then she slipped out of his embrace and rose to her feet.

"We are wasting time," she said. "I always drive before dinner, and I cannot go out in a tea-gown." She paused a moment to summon from her resources the words that would humiliate him most and slake the desire for vengeance that shrieked within her. She had never hated any one so bitterly before, not even in her youth, when snubs were frequent. For the third time she watched a coronet slip through her strong determined impotent fingers. She could forgive her husband and Brathland their untimely deaths, but for this young man, passionately in love with her, who tossed the dazzling prize aside as an actor might a "property crown," she felt such a rage of hatred that for almost a moment she thought of giving her inherited self the exquisite satisfaction of scratching his

eyes out. But it was too late in her day to be wholly natural, and, indeed, she preferred the weapons the world and her ambitions had given her. As he rose and stared at her doubtingly, she said, without a high or a sharp note, in her clear lisping voice:

"I think it wise to put an end to all this by telling you that I was engaged to Lord Brathland when he died. I was more in love with him than I ever shall be with any one again. You caught me in the violence of the rebound, for I was confused with grief, and distraction was welcome: you are always sufficiently amusing. I have not the least idea it would ever have come off, for, to tell you the truth, my friend, you are too hopelessly the *enfant gaté* for a woman who is neither young enough nor old enough to crave youth on any terms. As a husband, I fear, not to put too fine a point on it, you would be a bore. At the risk of being thought a snob—to which I am quite indifferent—I will add that as plain John Gwynne you seem to have so shrunk in size as to have become as insignificant as most men are, no doubt, when you catch a glimpse of their unmanufactured side. However"—with the air of a great lady dismissing an object of patronage—"I wish you good-fortune, and sincerely hope that we shall one day read of John Gwynne, senator, and recall for a moment the brilliant Elton Gwynne so long forgotten in this busy London of ours."

During quite half of her discourse Gwynne had felt his soul writhe under a rain of hot metal, gibber towards some abyss where it could hide its humiliation and its scars for ever. His brain seemed vacant and his very nostrils turned white. But like many clever people goaded to words by a furious sense of failure, she overshot her mark,

and before she finished his pride had made a terrified rebound and taken complete possession of him. He still felt stripped, lashed, a presumptuous youth before a scornful woman in the ripeness of her maturity, but it was imperative for his future self-respect that he should reassert his manhood and retire in good order. He let her finish, and then, as she stood with a still impatience, he lifted his eyes and drew himself up. His face was devoid of expression. His eyes did not even glitter; he might have been listening with voluntary politeness to the speech of majesty laying a corner-stone.

"You are quite right," he said. "You have given me the drubbing I deserve, and I am grateful to you. It was the only thing I needed to snap my last tie with England and brace me for the struggle in America. It emboldens me to ask another favor—that you will regard what I have told you of my plans as confidential. I shall give out that I am going to travel for a time. As I believe I mentioned, I do not wish to be recognized in the United States; and that by the time I have made my new name my old one will be forgotten, is one of the sure points upon which I have reckoned. Have I your promise?"

"My oath!" she said, flippantly; and although she was not generous enough to admire, and still felt as if the world itself were a corpse, every inherited instinct in her united in a visible respect for a poise that was a gift of the centuries, not a deftly manufactured mask.

She rang the bell and extended her hand. Gwynne shook it politely; and a moment later was walking down Park Lane in that singular state of elation that in mercurial natures succeeds one of the brutal blows of life, when all the forces of the spirit have leaped to the rescue.



PART II

1905



I

FOR Isabel Otis the *genius loci* had a more powerful and enduring magnetism than any man or woman she had ever known. She had felt the consolation of it, although without analysis, in her lonely girlhood by the great Rosewater Marsh; definitely in Tyrol, Perugia, Toledo, in Munich where she had lingered too long, in a hundred tiny high-perched and low-set villages of Austria and Italy of which the tourist had never heard, at Konigsee and Pragserwildsee; and deeply in England. But no place had ever called her, disturbed her, excited her into furious criticism, mockingly maintained its hold upon the very roots of her being, like the city of her birth. Her childhood's memories of it clustered about the old house on Russian Hill where the most cordial neighbors were goats; the beach by the Cliff House on a stormy day; long rides up and down the almost perpendicular hills of the city in the swift cable cars; and certain candy stores on Polk and Kearney streets. At long intervals there was a children's party at one of the fine houses on the ledge below her home; or out in the Western Addition, where an always migratory people were rivalling the splendors of Nob Hill—as that craggy height had long since humbled South Park and Rincon Hill into their abundant dust. She also cherished many charming memories of her mother, with dinner or ball-gown so prudently looped under her rain-coat that it

gave her slender figure the proportions of the old-fashioned hoop-skirt; always laughing as she kissed the little girls good-night before braving the two flights of steps to the carriage at the foot of the cliff. Two years before her death Mrs. Otis was glad to bury her mortification and misery in Rosewater. After that Isabel had never so much as a glimpse of San Francisco until she was sixteen, when her father was induced to visit his adopted daughter and take his youngest martyr with him. Isabel had planned for this visit throughout six long months, and arrived in the city of her heart radiant in a frock every breadth of which was new—heretofore her wardrobe had risen like an apologetic phœnix from the moth-eaten remnants of her mother's old finery—and such uncompromising trust in the benevolence of fate as a girl rarely knows twice in a lifetime. There were three days of enchanted prowling about the old house on Russian Hill, where, as the tenant, in the rocking-chair by the bedroom window, did not invite her to enter, she consoled herself with the views and the memories; and of an even more normal delight in the shopping streets and gay restaurants of a real city. After that the visit existed in her mind with the confused outlines of a nightmare.

Her adopted sister's peevish complaints at being obliged to remain in the foggy windy city all summer, the crying baby, the whirlwinds of dust and shivering nights, she might have dismissed as unworthy the spirit of sixteen, and dreamed herself happy. But Mr. Otis, who had been sober for seven months, selected this occasion for a fall which resounded from Market Street to Telegraph Hill, and rejuvenated the long line of saloons that had graced Montgomery Street since the days when "Jim" Otis had



been one of the wildest spirits in the wildest city on earth. That was "back in the Sixties," when his lapses were as far apart as they were unrivalled in consumption, span, and pyrotechny. By the late Eighties he had disappeared into the north, and the careless city knew him no more.

During the Seventies and early Eighties there had been a period of reform, incident upon his marriage with a pretty and high-spirited girl, and one of the city's estimable attempts to clean out its political stables. His brilliant and desperate encounter with Boss Buckley was historic, but its failure, and the indifference of the gay contented majority to the city's underworld, soured him and struck a fatal blow at the never vital roots of personal ambition. When he began to water the roots at his old haunts, the finish of his career and of his splendid inheritance passed into the region of problems that Time solves so easily. When she solved his problem he was glad to subside into one of his cottages in Rosewater. Here he reformed and collapsed, reformed and collapsed; but, with fewer temptations, and a remnant of his legal brilliancy, he supported his family after a fashion; and fed his pride to the day of his death with the fact that his wife, unlike the forgotten half of many another comet, had never been obliged to do her own work.

During that last visit to San Francisco, Isabel, guided by her amused brother-in-law, routed him out of no less than fourteen saloons, and spent night after night walking the streets with him to conquer the restlessness that otherwise would find a prolonged surcease beyond her influence. When she finally steered him back to Rosewater he fell into an exuberant fit of repentance, during which he was so charming and so legal that Isabel forgave him, laid by her

bitterness and mortification, and hoped. But although no repentance could maintain a grip upon that slippery flabby substance which he still called his character, at least he never went to San Francisco again. Occasionally he permitted Isabel to spend a week with her sister, while he pledged himself to good behavior during her absence; and kept his word. He always kept his word; and he took care to withhold it except when he was sure of himself. Isabel decided that as everything was relative it was better to have a dipsomaniac as her life portion than a drinking-machine of more steady and industrious habits.

Finally his patient clients left him, he sold the cottage in Rosewater—all that remained of his inheritance—to pay its mortgages, and moved with Isabel out to the ranch-house, preserved with a few hundred acres by the more canny and less thirsty Hiram. When the elder brother died James would have returned forthwith to the sources of supply, but by this time Isabel had the upper hand, and although he disappeared for days at a time, he was always forced to return to the ranch when the small monthly sum allowed him by the terms of his brother's will was exhausted; no one in Rosewater would give him credit. As he invariably left a note behind him promising to "be quiet about it," Isabel ceased to haunt his footsteps. His appetite was far beyond his control or hers, and as he kept his word and spent his time in the back parlor of a saloon, and had no longer the digestive capacity to achieve his former distinction, she merely sat at home and waited. Fortunately he did not live long enough after his brother hopelessly to embitter his daughter's youth. Liberty came to her when she had ceased to hate with young intolerance and begun to pity; and before too much

longing for freedom, and its insidious suggestions, had poisoned her nature. Indeed, when she had seen her father buried with much pomp in the cemetery behind Rosewater, and returned to the permanent peace of her home, she missed her cares and responsibilities, so long and systematically borne, and mourned, not as a child for its parent, but as an adoptive mother suddenly bereft. Nevertheless, she was bent upon enjoying her freedom to the utmost and rebelled against the obduracy of her uncle's executors, who disapproved of her pilgrimage to Europe unattended by a matron of Rosewater. Hiram Otis, who trusted no man, had appointed four executors; and had not Judge Leslie been one of them the other three might have delayed the settling of the estate beyond the legal term. But at the end of a year Isabel was absolute mistress of her property and herself.

One of the happiest moments of her life was when she sat before her lawyer's table in San Francisco and watched the pen strokes that cancelled the mortgage of the house on Russian Hill. The house and its acre, encumbered by the inevitable mortgage, had been all that remained of Mrs. Otis's personal inheritance when she left San Francisco for ever. James Otis had promised his dying wife that he would never sell the place, which she bequeathed to Isabel; and when his last client left him and he could no longer pay the interest, Hiram, who was morosely devoted to his niece, met the yearly obligation: he would not redeem the mortgage unless he were permitted to buy the property. But to this James Otis, clinging to his solitary virtue, would not consent; and Hiram, although he intended to leave all he possessed to Isabel, could not bring himself to part with any sum in four figures.

Before leaving for Europe Isabel had leased the house to a young newspaper man whose wife had an income of her own, and not only an artistic appreciation of the view, but a more practical esteem for a site so far removed from the "all-night life" below. Immediately after Isabel's return Mrs. Glait had asked permission to sublet the house, remarking cynically that time had inured her to the desultory phenomena of journalism, but never to the stable prospect of her husband's death struggle with foot-pads, or her children falling down the cliff of this wild bit of nature in the heart of a city.

Isabel took back her old home with another spasm of delight, and vowed that not until she was a pauper would she part with it again. Five or six days of every week must be spent on the chicken-ranch, which had grown to such proportions that she was now one of the persons that counted in her flourishing community. But in time she would live more and more in her lofty home, become a notable figure in San Francisco, drawing with both hands from its varied best; and meanwhile, once a week, she could sit for hours and look down upon the city, which, even in rainy weather, was a wild and beautiful sight from her eyrie.

Mrs. Otis had been a niece of the Mrs. Montgomery who had reigned on Rincon Hill twenty years ago, and a cousin of the Helena Belmont who had been the greatest belle the city had seen since that earlier time when Nina Randolph, Guadalupe Hathaway, Mrs. Hunt McLane, and "The Three Macs" had made history for themselves in spite of the momentous era of which they were so unheeding a part. Mary Belmont would have been no mean heiress herself had not her father been too adventurous a spirit

on the stock-market during the Belcher Bonanza excitement of 1872. For a time it looked as if Gordon Belmont would be a far richer man than his famous brother, Colonel Jack, always contented with a modest million; but in ten mad days there was a decline of sixty million dollars in the aggregate value of stocks on the San Francisco market; and six months later, when he died of sheer exhaustion, he had nothing to leave his only child but the house on Russian Hill, and a small income generously supplemented by her uncle and guardian until her marriage. She was thirteen at her father's death, and as her mother had preceded him, she spent the following five years in a New York boarding-school. Then she returned home, and, after a year's gayety, married James Otis. Colonel Belmont surrendered her small property. Skilfully "turned over" it would have multiplied indefinitely. But James Otis and his wife knew far more about spending money than making it, and to-day nothing was left to commemorate the meteoric and eminently typical career of Gordon Belmont but the ancient structure whose nucleus he had taken over just after his marriage as a "bad debt." His wife, too, had insisted upon living in it, for reasons subsequently understood by her daughter and Mrs. Glait, and complacently enlarged it with all the hideous improvements of the day.

That part of Russian Hill conspicuous from the city is little more than a great cliff rising abruptly from the extreme north end of the graded ledge on the summit of Nob Hill, which, in its turn, almost overhangs the steep and populous ascent from the valley. In "early days" none but the goat could cling to those rough hills that all but stood on end, and the brush was so thick and the

titles so uncertain that their future distinction was undreamed of. Then came a determined period of grading which embraced the heights in due course, titles were settled, and many that foresaw the ultimate possession of that great valley now known as "South of Market Street" —but which in its haughty youth embraced South Park and Rincon Hill—by the tenacious sons of Erin and Germania, moved to the uplands while lots could still be bought for a song. The Jack Belmonts, the Yorbas, the Polks, and others of the first aristocracy to follow the Spanish, made Nob Hill fashionable before a new class of millionaires sprang up in a night, and indulged its fresh young fancy with monstrous wooden structures holding a large portion of converted capital. Mrs. Yorba, who led society in the Eighties, when it was as exclusive as a small German principality, was disposed to snub all parvenus. But the young people made their way. When Mary Belmont returned from school, and, chaperoned by a widowed relative, gave at least a dance a month until she married, and many a one after, the heirs of all grades thought nothing of leaving their carriages at the foot of the cliff to climb the precarious stair; groping blindly more often than not through the rains of winter or the fogs of summer. To-day Isabel's neighbors wisely made no such demands upon the pampered, but in that incomparably older time the young people would have climbed to the stars for the sake of the lavish hospitality of the gay indulgent young hostess; and if some of the youths rolled down the hill when the lights went out, that was hardly a matter to excite indignant comment in a city where drink was so admittedly the curse that it was philosophically accepted with such other standing evils

as fogs, trade-winds, small-pox, mud-holes, dust-storms, and unmentionable politics.

When Mary Belmont became the wife of James Otis, one of the greatest ranchers in California—in which State, unlike other fervent patriots of that era, he had been born—and a brilliant figure in one of the most notable legal groups of any time, she long held her position as a social favorite. But children came and died too quickly for her health and fragile beauty, and the storms of life beset her. She continued to live in her inconvenient eyrie, not only in the waning hope of ultimately separating her husband from the convivial beings on the lower plain, but because she felt an intense pride in owning a home two generations old in that young community. She was determined that it should remain in the family and be occupied by at least one of her children. So the ugly brown wooden structure with its bay-windows, its central tower, its Mansard-roof—added for the servants—had, contrary to all tradition, actually joined three generations of San Franciscans in one unbroken chain. It owed its proud position, no doubt, to the fact that when the Otis fortunes collapsed there was but one child left to inherit it and to be supported meanwhile.

Isabel intended in time to give the house a new façade, and had gloated over such of the Burnham plans as had been reproduced by the city press. These lovely plans were designed to make the city as classic and imposing as Nature had dreamed of when she piled up that rugged amphitheatre out of chaos; and Isabel had long since resolved that, if she could not be the first to plant a bit of ancient Athens upon a brown and ragged bluff, the high tide of her fortunes should coincide with the awakening of the city

to the sense of its architectural guilt. She banished much of the tasteless furniture of the old time, and refitted with a stately comfort that expressed one side of her nature. She too clung to traditions—and to the long mirrors in their tarnished gilt frames, with the little shelf below; the multitude of family portraits engraved on wood, and surrounded by a wide white margin and tiny gilt frame. That they might strike no discordant note, she made use of a lesson learned in London, where she had spent a month with Lady Victoria, and had the walls and wood of the living-room painted white, covered the windows and furniture with a plain stuff of a dark but neutral blue. In the dining-room were a few paintings of her New England and Spanish ancestors, and she disturbed them only to replace the wall-paper with leather; at the same time sending the black walnut furniture to the auction-room.

Being the one practical member of her family, and the product of an earthquake country, she repaired the uncertain foundations of her house before removing the walls that had cut up the lower floor into the conventional number of rooms and hallways. The house, of no great depth, was so close to the hill-side, still rising above it, that more than one enterprising cook had made use of the natural ledges before the windows. Besides the kitchen department and pantries, there were now but three rooms on the lower floor: the dining-room, a small reception-room in the tower, and an immense living-room, broken by the white pillars that supported the storys above.

Mrs. Belmont and Mrs. Otis, in the time-honored American fashion, had made a day nest of their bedroom, but Isabel was far too modern for that lingering provincial-

ism, and lived luxuriously in the big room down-stairs when she was not in the porch. She had reserved her mother's old alcoved bedroom with its mahogany four-poster for her own use, but the rest of the second-story rooms she had fitted for her English cousins, that they too might have headquarters in town.

Neither appeared to be in any haste to visit the city of their ancestors. Gwynne had left England in October, now nearly a year ago, but, having discovered from his solicitor that he could apply for letters of citizenship as late as the end of the third year after landing, had announced to Isabel his intention to travel slowly about the country "before settling down in its remotest part, which, from all accounts, was sufficiently unlike the rest to provincialize his point of view unless he saw something first of the East, South, and Middle West." He had written to her several times, but only on business. She had returned in January, after a round of visits in England, and had put his house in order at once. The lease had expired, and Mr. Colton had engaged a temporary superintendent, but Gwynne sent Isabel his power of attorney and she was temporarily in possession. She wrote to him from time to time that all was well, or to send him an account of her expenditures; but felt no promptings towards a friendly correspondence with one who showed as little disposition to encourage it.

From Victoria she had not heard directly since she bade her good-bye in Curzon Street, but Flora Thangue had written that her ladyship's superb health had (to her ill-concealed fury) given way, following an attack of influenza, and she would not be able to leave her doctor for an indefinite time. A few months later she wrote that "dear

Vicky" was outwardly herself again, but in reality very nervous, the result, no doubt, of her illness, and of the prolonged stress of business. However, she had finally succeeded in letting the Abbey and Capheaton to advantage, and it was on the cards that she would reach California before the end of the year. Isabel hoped that, unfed by her son's exacting presence the maternal fires burned low; she had a clearly defined intention to be a factor in the new career of Elton Gwynne, and no desire for the capricious interference of his mother.

II

AS Isabel stood in her little porch that brilliant September morning, she dismissed her occasional regret that she had not remained in England for a London season. Not only had she put the time to better use on her ranch, but no doubt her agent would have relet this house, and delayed the fulfilment of one of those dreams upon which she unconsciously fed her soul. The shrieking trade-winds and the dense white fogs were hibernating somewhere out in the Pacific. All the city, in the great irregular amphitheatre below, was sharply outlined in the yellow light; Isabel wondered if the sun renewed its stores from the golden veins to north and south. On the wide broken ledge just beneath her pinnacle was the concrete evidence of an architectural orgy to be seen nowhere else on earth: wooden mansions with the pure outlines of the Renaissance; a Gothic palace with bow-windows, also of wood; a big brown-stone house in the style of New York; piles of shingles and stones; here and there a touch of Romanesque, later French, and Italian; the majority of those plutocratic and perishable masses, of no style in particular, unless it were that of Mansard combined with the criminalities of him who invented the bow-window and the irrelevant tower. On the slopes were a few old houses in gardens, some with cottage roofs, others square, brown, dusty, melancholy. But the majority were of the "house in a

row" type, radiating in all directions from the "rooming-house blocks" on the lower slopes. Then, down on the plain, came the big compact masses of stone and concrete, brick and steel, devoted to business and housing of the itinerant. The lofty domes of the City Hall and a newspaper building, a few church spires and the great white-stone hotel on a crest not far from Isabel's, were the sole pretenders to architectural beauty within her ken.

Far away she could make out the Mission Church, once called after St. Francis of Assisi, now named Dolores for the tarnished saint. It was the last reminder of the work of the Spanish fathers, and looked indescribably ancient in the midst of that busy and densely populated district. At night Isabel watched the lights of the electric cars flashing about that old monument of an almost forgotten romance—like the angry haunted eyes of the padres that had known it in the wilderness for naught. But although this old church and the Presidio, which still retained its quadrangle and a few of the original adobe houses, appealed deeply to Isabel, an account of the romance of Spanish and Church Argentine that distinguished her family, her most personal sympathies were with the streets that knew her childhood, packed as they were with memories of humorous, gay, pathetic, or tragic people that had made the city great.

Even the disandated houses, with their sixty steps or more toppling above the cut that had widened and leveled the street, had been very hospitable in their time, and Isabel knew that her mother and grandmother had trailed up those perpendicular flights in satin slippers and ballooning skirts on many a rainy night. Mrs. Otis had told her little girls stories of all those old houses, fine

and simple, more particularly of the fortunate mansions on Nob Hill's brief level. Isabel longed for the time when she should enter them and pick up the threads dropped from her mother's nerveless fingers. The Belmont house was closed, the still restless Helena occupying a palace in Rome at the moment. The Polk house had been sold to the energetic son of one of the plodding old money-makers that had fought shy of stock gambling and railroads. Nicolas Hofer belonged to the latest type the prolific city had bred: the son of a millionaire, but a keen man of business, whom the wildness of the city had never tempted, highly educated, honorable, and an ardent reformer.

Magdaléna Yorba—Mrs. Trennahan—like most of her old neighbors, still dwelt in the ancestral mansion, although she had given it a stucco façade and shaved off the bow-windows. In each, Isabel was sure of welcome, and she longed particularly to wander through the old Polk house, where one of her Spanish great-aunts had reigned for a time. Like all San Franciscans of family, she took more pride in her young-old city than a Roman in his Rome. Its forty-two square miles had seen so many changes, its story was so romantic and unique, that its age was not to be measured by the standards of Time. Her grandfather had stood on this hill after his Sunday climb and looked over and down a ragged wilderness to the city bursting out of its shell—a wretched huddle of shacks and tents by the water's edge. The bay no doubt was crowded with ships from every corner of the world, many of them deserted, unmanned, forced to lie idle until the return of the hungry disappointed gold-seekers. That was less than sixty years ago. In the first ten years of its

rapid growth the city had burned seven times, millions blazing out in an hour.

To-day San Francisco was replete not only with life but with wealth, talents, and every variety of enterprise; it was as full of fads and cults and artistic groups as London itself; it had sent forth authors, artists, mummers, singers—and millionaires by the score. Many of the art treasures of the world had been brought here and hidden from the vulgar in those awful impermanent "palatial mansions." Some of the finest libraries of the world were here. It had its bibliomaniacs, its collectors, its precieux. And yet what a lonely city it was, stranded on the edge of the still half-vacant western section of the United States, with all the Pacific before it. Save for the rim of towns across the bay, which were little more than a part of itself, it watched the Orient alone, and was far too gay and careless, too self-absorbed and insolent, to keep its jaws on the alert. Tact it was much too high-handed to cultivate. It welcomed the hungry Oriental for so long as he was useful, and when he outstayed his welcome, incontinently kicked him out. San Francisco's intensity of independence as well as of civic pride was due in part no doubt to the isolation which compelled it to be self-centred, and to its unconscious dislike of the elder breeds beyond the Rocky Mountains; but largely to the old adventurous reckless gambling spirit and the hab of sleeping on its pistol. These first causes had develo individuality to such proportions that the hair of fornian bristled when he was alluded to as a "Y or even as a mere American.

And with time the patriotism of ciscan waxed rather than waned

the fashion to take one's money to New York, merely because of the higher cost of living that made a millionaire "feel his oats," and of the allure of the older and more difficult society to his women. San Franciscans still fled from the winds and fogs of summer to their beloved Europe, and country-house life gained ground very slowly, but deserters were few; and of late the rich men had shown their faith not only by investing the greater part of their capital in the city—until "improved real estate" was become a current phrase—but the best of them, including Hofer and the mayor who had preceded the present figurehead and his omnivorous Boss, were engaged in a desperate battle with the highly organized gang of political ruffians that owned and pillaged and dishonored the city in a manner with which nothing in the history of municipal corruption could compare save the old Tweed Ring of New York. For at least ten years previous to 1901, San Francisco had enjoyed a period of not only decent but honorable government. There was no "graft" in high places, the city was out of debt, it held up its head with the cleanest municipal governments in the land. But, as ever, the disinterested grew somnolent with content, and gave no heed to the burrowing of the hungry recuperated and wiser rats in that prolific underworld whence never a high-minded citizen emerges. The few that saw and warned were disregarded; and circumstances, proper in themselves, swelled the ranks of the petty politicians with thousands of greedy and insurgent laborers. San Francisco awoke one morning to find herself in the drag-net of a machine to which old Boss Buckley and the illustrious Tammany doffed their hats. But the majority still gave little heed, too content in their

various blessings, and the gay light spirit the climate gave them, to foresee the time when their pleasant city would be utterly debauched, and life among arrogant thieves, prostitutes, and socialists have become as impracticable as it already was in Chinatown or on Barbary Coast.

A group of the more thoughtful and patriotic citizens, assisted by the one militant editor the city boasted, were doing all that was humanly possible to prevent the re-election of the mayor, who had already represented the worst element twice, and to break the power of the Boss. Isabel in her lonely ranch house, when her chickens were asleep, followed the fight with a passionate interest, and was tempted to come forth from her seclusion and meet at least the representative men of her city. But she was not yet ready to take up her own share of the burden, and was far too modest to imagine that she could be useful until she had become a person of importance in San Francisco. Nevertheless, as she looked down to-day on the sharp outlines of the city under the hard blue sky, almost glittering in their golden bath, she was impatient to become a part of its life, or at least to discuss its interests with some one. Rosewater, which of late years had become virtuous to excess, and almost blind and deaf with local pride, took no interest in San Francisco whatever, except as a market for eggs. When driven to the wall it confessed the superiority of the metropolis in the matter of shops and theatres; but its politics it invariably dismissed with adjectives more forcible than elegant.

It was at this point in Isabel's meditations that her eye happened to rove along the plank walk to the rickety old flight of steps that led from Taylor Street up Russian Hill.



There was something vaguely familiar about a tall, thin, well-groomed, but by no means graceful, figure rapidly ascending the steps. In a moment her mind lost its tensity of projection and she was almost flying down her own long stair.

Gwynne broke into a run as he saw her. She wondered if he intended to kiss her, but he merely shook her hand for a full minute.

"I never in my life was so glad to see anybody!" he exclaimed, with the joyousness of a school-boy come home for his first holiday. "It was such luck to hear that you were in San Francisco."

"But why didn't you telegraph? In a way I am disappointed—glad as I am to see you. I intended to meet you at Oakland and take you directly up to Lumalitas, where everything was to have been in gala array. And how did you know I was in town?"

"While I was taking my lonely breakfast this morning—I arrived late yesterday afternoon—and glancing over one of your newspapers, my eye caught your name. I learned that 'the charming and beautiful young mistress of the old Belmont House on Russian Hill, who had excited so much interest of late, had come down as usual for Sunday.'"

"No?" Isabel flushed for the first time within Gwynne's knowledge of her. "That is the very only time I have been the subject of a newspaper paragraph—outside of Rosewater, which doesn't count—and I am as delighted—as I have no doubt you were the first time you saw your name in print!" she added, defiantly.

There was nothing cynical in Gwynne's smile. "I understand," he said; and then, as he ceased to smile, the light died out of his face, and Isabel noticed that it

was older and thinner. It had lost more than a little of its aloof serenity, and his crest was visibly lowered. But on the whole he was improved, for he had cut his hair, his lilting locks having been too conspicuous a feature in the cartoons of *Punch* and *Vanity Fair*. But there was something subtly forlorn about him, and Isabel's maternal promptings, once too active, but long moribund, suddenly awakened.

They mounted the steep flight of steps to the house slowly, exchanging ejaculatory remarks. When they reached the porch she motioned to a long wicker chair.

"It is only ten," she said. "Luncheon will not be ready until one, and my California hospitality demands that your entertainment shall begin at once. Make yourself comfortable while I brew you a cup of Spanish chocolate. I have actually one of the molinillos of our ancestors."

When she returned with the frothy and fragrant beverage he was standing with his hands in his pockets staring down at the city. He turned swiftly at the sound of her step on the wood, but something was rushing to the back of his eyes, and once more Isabel had the singular impression of hearing his spirit cry: "Oh God! Oh God!" But his lips were hard pressed and his eyes became suddenly contemptuous, then smiling.

"This is jolly of you," he said. "I have a weakness for chocolate——cultivated during the winter I was in Munich with my tutor. I never cared for beer—don't like anything bitter. Do you remember the Café Luitpoldt, and all those little tables in the garden of the Residenz—"

He paused and narrowed his eyes. Isabel had turned

white. "I must hear that story," he said, quietly. "You are my only friend out here. In a way you have altered the whole course of my life. I shall always have a sense of relationship with you quite different from anything I have ever known. So there must be perfect confidence and openness between us. I told you frankly the unpleasant finish of my episode with Mrs. Kaye. I hate mystery. I saw you go white once before, when I tried to make you talk about Munich; and the romantic Flora was full of surmises. Confession is good for the soul, anyhow. I want the atmosphere cleared—not out of curiosity—I don't care tuppence about other people's affairs—but I don't know you! I must know you! I am always conscious of a wall about you—and in this damned God-forsaken country I must have one friend!" he burst out.

Isabel had quite recovered herself. "I will tell you everything, but not now. We must be in the mood. This moment I am interested in nothing but yourself. Sit down. What has happened to you in all these months? Something not altogether pleasant. Have you had any adventures? Have you been recognized?"

He had finished his chocolate, and he clasped his hands behind his head and leaned back in his chair, giving the railing a slight kick.

"No," he said, grimly, "I have not been recognized. At first I avoided all the big hotels, lest I might be; then growing more secure, and disliking the inferior ones, I became quite reckless. The second time I visited New York I went to the Waldorf-Astoria, and the third time to the St. Regis. In the smoking-rooms of all the hotels and trains I talked with any one whom I found disposed to

conversation. Not that I was; but I was perambulating the country for an object and determined to accomplish it. As you had told me to improve my manners I did my best, and have reason to believe that, if not effusive, I am almost cynically approachable. In New York I was at times repelled with a haughty stare or a negative frigidity which no duke I know could compass. But in Boston they were more friendly, and farther West so expansive that I was frequently invited to houses before I had presented my modest card. Very often I had long talks with newspaper men, and made no attempt to conceal the fact that I was a Britisher. Once or twice that fact was commented on, but taken as a matter of course. There are a good many Britishers in the United States. My identity was never suspected. I never saw a newspaper paragraph about myself."

He laughed, but looked at her between lids so narrowed that she could not see the expression of his eyes. She nodded, smiling; and she could make her smile very sweet and encouraging.

"The time came when I felt like a shipwrecked mariner. Stranded! Abandoned! Forgotten! Finally—take all the circumstances into consideration and make due allowance—I felt that I would risk everything to see my name in print once more. I arrived in Chicago late one night. There had been a break-down that doubled the time of the beastly trip. I went to its first hotel and registered myself as Elton Gwynne. The night clerk, with the haughty indifference of the stage duke, or the New-Yorker who fancies himself, called a bell-boy and turned his back on me. I remained in Chicago three days. Not a reporter sent up his card. Not a line appeared in a

newspaper. It was the most chastening experience of my life. No doubt it did me good. My ego has actually felt lighter." He smiled. But he added in a moment: "It left a scar, nevertheless."

"Never mind," said Isabel, consolingly. "All that will read delightfully in your biography. What on this difficult globe is not difficult, first, last, and always? The only thing for you to do is to snap your fingers at everything, as we do out here, and see nothing in the future but success. How do you like the land of your birth?"

"I hate it!" he said intensely. "Washington is a crude unwieldy village. New York is like one of those nightmares a certain class of writers project and label 'Earth in the Year 2000.' Chicago is the entrails of the universe. The small interior towns and villages of the Eastern States are open mausoleums for people so old and so dried up that their end will be not death but desiccation. There is nothing picturesque in those old towns, for they were dead before they were civilized. Some of the cities and villages of the South are certainly attractive to look at and have a background of a sort, but they are as lifeless as their negroes. The cities of the West are hives, and when you have seen one you have seen all. Its smaller communities are horrors, pure and simple. Much of the country is magnificent. The Adirondacks, the Hudson River, Yellowstone, those great prairies and deserts, atone for a good deal. The last three weeks I have spent in southern California. It seemed to me—below Santa Barbara, at least — little more than a reclaimed desert — and with nothing of the wonderful atmospheric effects of the great interior deserts; nothing but dirt and a hideous low shrub caked with prehistoric dust. Precious little of it reclaimed

at that. I am glad that ranch is in good hands. I never want to see the place again. That eternally grinning sky! That dead atmosphere! It blunted my nerves for the time, but the reaction is all the worse. However—" He stood up and leaned over the railing. "I did not expect the earthly paradise. I am not going to treat you to a continued diatribe—"

"But you must like California—love it!" cried Isabel, in alarm. "Of course you have hated everything—natural enough—but not California! It is your State, your home, your future. You must begin by liking it, at least.

"Very well, mentor, I shall do my best. One might certainly indulge in an illusion or two up here. I thought as I walked—climbed—through the city, guided a part of the way by a messenger-boy, who ejaculated at intervals, 'Say, mister!' and described Nob Hill as the 'millionaire bunch,' that I had seldom seen so many ugly buildings together; but from this perch of yours it looks quite beautiful. Still I long for the country. Can we go to the ranch this afternoon?"

"Why not?" Isabel stifled a sigh. She had intended to ride all round the city on the electric cars; but she felt as if she had an adopted homesick child on her hands, and he was a responsibility that she had deliberately assumed. Moreover, she felt deeply sorry for him.

"You can express all your luggage but a portmanteau, and we will go in my launch. It is down on the bay side of the Hill. We must start at four to catch the tide. You have no idea how cosey and pretty your ranch-house looks, and I have sent out my uncle's law—and farm—library. I have arranged everything with Judge Leslie, and you enter his office at once. He



is the first lawyer of northern California. I wrote you that it would be impossible to conceal the truth from him, as his firm has done all the legal business of the estate for the last thirty years, and he knows your mother has only one son. But he is the more interested. No one else knows but Mr. Colton and his son Tom—your Rosewater bankers and agents. Your secret is safe with them. Gwynne is not an uncommon name in California, although some of its letters have been dropped. Lumalitas has been leased for so many years that your name has ceased to be associated with it in the public mind, and the deeds are so deeply buried in the archives of St. Peter—the county-seat—that the most curious would hardly attempt to unearth them. Of course most townspeople all through the State take in a San Francisco paper, and your name has doubtless appeared now and again in the telegrams. But they are not the sort that take the least interest in the career of a young Englishman—those that do, at all events, are few and far between. Judge Leslie is deeply interested; so is Tom Colton, the only son of the bank, so to speak. He is a Democrat, by-the-way—but I don't suppose you have made up your mind—"

"I have quite made up my mind. In practice one party seems about as bad as the other, but at least the Democratic ideals more nearly correspond with my own. Besides, the Democratic party is the under dog, and that always appeals to me, to say nothing of the fact that it is weak in strong men, that all its salient leaders are what you so elegantly term 'blatherskites.' If I go in for American politics, I must fight so hard that I cannot help becoming absorbed body and soul; with only the present and the future—no past. Let us take a walk over these hills."

III

"DO you run this thing yourself?" asked Gwynne, as they boarded the launch, which was at anchor by the end of the sea wall at the foot of Russian Hill.

"Rather. How do you expect me to make a fortune in this paradise of the labor-union if I don't do things myself? I have a hard time being economical, and I suspect that where I save once I spend twice, but I try not to think about it. Theories make life so palatable! This old launch belonged to Uncle Hiram. I had it repaired, and take my eggs to the hatcheries and my produce to Rosewater three times a week. There I deal direct with the San Francisco buyers—and in this launch; it serves me very well as an office. Then I come down in it every week. The railroad is exorbitant, and the boats are too slow. It may be that gasolene and repairs cost more than a railroad fare once a week, but I have abstained from making a comparison. The trip is so delightful!"

The launch was about twenty feet long with a small cabin and a fresh coat of brown paint. It shot lightly over the smooth water, and Gwynne sat on top of the cabin above Isabel swinging his long legs, and looked with some envy at the hundreds of yachts that skimmed the bay. They appeared and vanished about the corners of the Islands and promontories like birds swooping after prey. The Islands and all the mainland had lost their greens

long since, but the burnt grasses shone in the sun like hammered gold; were tan and brown and fawn on the shadowed eastern slopes. The chain of mountains beyond the towns across the bay and facing San Francisco glittered like bronze, but the lofty volcanic peak of Monte Diablo, farther still, was a pale and misty blue. North of the Golden Gate and high above the mountains of Marin County, Mount Tamalpais was so intense and hard a blue, and was cut against the fleckless sky with so sharp an outline, that it produced in Gwynne a vague sense of unreality and uneasiness. The Marconi poles on the summit looked like the masts of a mammoth ship, and every window of The Tavern, close by them, shone like a plate of brass.

They steered for the southern point of Angel Island, and Gwynne looked about him with much interest. The mainland of the great northern cove and the eastern side of the Islands were thick with trees: oaks, buckeye, willows, madroño. And almost as thickly set, although sometimes half hidden, were the villas: light and airy of architecture, gayly painted, with broad verandas and overhanging vines. At the foot of Belvedere and the little town of Tiburon were house-boats, in which people lived for eight months of the year.

And everywhere, people, people, people. They swarmed in the yachts, on the house-boats, on the driveways, the verandas. Gwynne twisted about and looked at San Francisco. The palaces were on the heights and in the Western Addition—out towards the Presidio and the Golden Gate; but hundreds of tiny dwellings clung to the precipitous sides of Telegraph Hill and Russian Hill as if their foundations were talons. And each had its bit

of garden, or its balcony full of flowers. Telegraph Hill, the great bluff where the city turned almost at a right angle from north to south, was given over largely to Mexicans and Italians, and was uncommonly vivid. And the streets were full of people. The city had turned itself inside out. Everywhere were bright gowns and parasols, whizzing cars packed to the rails.

And the wealthy class by no means monopolized the bay with their yachts and luxurious launches. There were fishing-smacks filled with whole families of Italians and Chinese; in fact every tongue floated over the water in the course of a brilliant Sunday afternoon. And at the docks there were steamers, sailing vessels, from all the ports of the world, a forest of spars and funnels; odd little Italian craft and even a Chinese junk. A man-of-war was coming down from Mare Island. Gwynne had seen a big Australian liner flying the Union Jack enter the Golden Gate as the launch rounded Angel Island. It made him homesick, and he was not sorry to lose sight of it.

They passed steamboats crowded with holiday seekers coming home from a day's outing in Sausalito, San Rafael, Mill Valley, sporting parks; the majority noisy and vulgar, but a mass of color. It was a scene of surpassing variety, life, gayety, prosperity, importance. Gwynne, as the light electrical breeze began to prick his veins, experienced a sensation of pride in the country where his lines were cast, in those ancestors of his that had memorably helped to develop its vast resources: a tremendous concession, for he had barely acknowledged these ancestors before. A slight meed of resignation descended upon him. He smiled down upon Isabel, who was frowning at the sun

and sighing for her forgotten veil; she had a tender regard for her complexion. Gwynne thought her very pretty in her smart crash suit and sailor hat, not nearly so severe and fateful in appearance as when she had adjusted herself to the formalities of Capheaton; although he remembered that he had heard much discussion of her beauty and had not been unappreciative himself. But he liked her far better here in California. Her eyes were more alert, her voice was less monotonous; and those little black moles looked particularly fascinating on the ivory white of her skin, fairly luminous in the sunlight. He fancied they would drift into matrimony; and that she appeared to be as indifferent and passionless as she was handsome and clever but the better suited his present mood. His love for Mrs. Kaye had died a sudden and violent death, but it had left him callous, somewhat contemptuous of the charms of woman. He doubted if his heart would ever beat high in his breast again, but in the course of events he should need a partner, and Isabel seemed to him fashioned to be the helpmate of a busy and ambitious statesman.

But all he said was: "You have a little freckle on your nose. I saw it come."

Isabel shrugged her shoulders and sniffed. He lost interest in her for the moment, for he distrusted a woman without vanity. He knew girls too little to suspect that the most business-like were often smitten with a desire to pose; and were as likely to forget the pose of to-day in the naturalness of to-morrow. Secretly, Isabel was grievously afflicted at the thought of the freckle, and did not speak for some time, recalling the antidotes of her early girlhood, when she and Anabel Leslie experimented in secret with various beauty recipes cut from the newspapers. She

smiled as she recalled that Anabel, who had pretty golden hair, had washed it with lye to acquire a reddish tinge, and been forced to retire for a month; and a semi-tragic experience of her own—smothered from crown to toe in a blanket taking a hot-air bath for the benefit of her complexion, the spirit lamp, in a wash-basin under the chair, exploded, and there was one interminable moment of panic, and several days of discomfort. She quite forgot her companion in these lighter reminiscences of a period that seemed far more than ten years agone.

Gwynne had discovered at Capheaton that one of his cousin's charms was her absence of effort in conversation and a corresponding indifference to effort in others. They did not exchange a syllable as they sped up the wider expanse of the bay east of the Islands, and he watched the hills and mountains close on his left, with their bright little towns and sombre depths of forest. Many of the rounded cones of the foothills were bare, and so was the rocky crest of Tamalpais, but the old redwoods still held triumphant possession of several of the slopes and all of the cañons. Here and there factories and warehouses marred the almost primeval beauty of the scene, but to-day at least there was no smoke to cobweb the radiant sky. Even the Chinese shrimp-pickers were lounging on the beach before their little shack village.

They passed the last of the towns. Towers and sharp roofs rose above the mass of cultivated trees in some private park; the trees a motley collection of pines and palms, eucalyptus and oak, madroño, laurel, locust, and acacia. The gardens were full of children and birds. On the roads horses in old-fashioned buggies danced at automobiles whizzing by. In the yachts even the men

had laid aside their keen anxious look—as peculiar to the young San Franciscan of business as to the New-Yorker or Westerner—and were bent upon absolute relaxation for the day. One millionaire was alone in his big luxurious launch, a broad grin on his homely ingenuous countenance, and even his mouth open to inhale the clean and sparkling air. His hands were clasped on his curves.

"He inherited," said Isabel, in reply to Gwynne's comment that he did not look as if he ever expended his energies in the piling of dollars. "And he doesn't want any more. But they all look well enough. It is not only the climate but the cooking."

They left San Francisco Bay and Isabel steered more carefully: the channel in the Bay of San Pablo is narrow and the current treacherous. When they reached the drawbridge they were not only alone on the wide silvery expanse of water, but there was scarcely a country-house to break the wild loneliness of mountain and cañon. After they entered Rosewater Creek the mountains with their broken and multiplying ridges were more imposing still, and before long another range began to taper northward on the opposite shore. They were in the great tidal marsh now, green, where all the rest of the world was burnt and dry. At times the creek was as wide as an ordinary river, at others so contracted that one could gather grass on either side. Isabel told Gwynne to "watch out for other boats," for the creek wound and twisted and doubled like a mammoth brown snake into an infinite perspective, broken here and there by sailing boats that had the effect of skimming the land. It was a scene reminiscent of Holland, but far more beautiful, with

the wild primeval character of the landscape and the grandeur of the mountains.

Isabel indicated an island well out in the marsh. It was crowned with a white house shaded by many trees. Men in duck trousers, and coatless, were lounging in the shade.

"That is a country club," she said. "Tom Colton will put you up. But if you are still disinclined to sociabilities you can shoot all the ducks you want on my place."

"Shoot what?"

"Best duck-shooting in the world is out here—canvas-back, teal, English widgeon — fancy your not knowing that. It begins on the fifteenth of October. I have not rented my marshlands this year, and intend to shoot ducks for the market. You can help me and we'll go halves."

Gwynne's eyes were sparkling. He had expected to kill his bear and deer, but any variety of sport new or old gave him joy. Isabel pointed to many little shanties on the edge of the marsh.

"The more enthusiastic sit in those and wait for the tide to come back. I avoid being left high and dry, for if the ducks go elsewhere it is rather a bore."

The mountains on the left diminished in height, turned off abruptly to the northwest, following the coast line. Those on the right took form in the pink mist that enveloped them, for the sun had set. All the lower sky was pink, melting imperceptibly into the still pale blue of day. Far to the north other mountains seemed suddenly to heave from the level, villages appeared, with great stretches of farming land between. Then the glow faded into the gray of twilight and the vast landscape took on a sudden aspect of desolation; as of a country stranded,

forgotten, with a heap of stones here and there to mark some ancient civilization.

"There is Rosewater—over there where the lights are coming out; and here we are," said Isabel.

Gwynne turned with a start and found that Isabel had run her launch up to a little pier. Behind it was a cluster of low hills set with narrow fields and tiny white houses. In the foreground was a large house of two stories and no architecture whatever, although the roof was mercifully flat. It was painted white and surrounded by a broad veranda. The garden was full of bare rosebushes and blooming chrysanthemums, but save for two mournful eucalypti and a naked acacia, there was not a tree in sight. Just behind were many out-buildings, stark and white.

"Is this where you live?" asked Gwynne, wonderingly. He had vaguely pictured her in a romantic setting, a bit of California epitomized.

"It was like Uncle Hiram to sell off the prettiest parts, but I don't bother about anything I can't help, and I have a lovely view opposite. Where is that boy?" She raised her voice and called, "Chuma! Chuma!" and in a moment a Japanese boy came running down to the pier.

"The two men spend Sunday in Rosewater, but I have trained my Jap to do a little of everything," said Isabel, as they walked up to the house. "He is one of the willing sort; most are not. Chuma is my cook and butler and chambermaid—"

"Do you mean that you live here without any other woman?"

"Why not? No girl would stay in this lonely place I should have to send her in to Rosewater every night and

get a second girl to keep her company. Mac—who was with Uncle Hiram before I was born—sleeps in the house. It was a hotel forty years ago, by-the-way, and is still known as Old Inn. That was in the days of picturesque ruffianism, and there are terrible stories about the house, but no ghosts."

It had been decided that Gwynne should dine with Isabel and spend the night at the hotel in Rosewater. Isabel had telephoned to her patient Jap, and there was a log fire in the "parlor"—now transformed into a comfortable living-room. Gwynne looked about him with considerable curiosity while Isabel was up-stairs dressing. The walls were "ceiled" with redwood and hung with the photographs she had accumulated in her travels, a motley collection of many climes, from the snows of the Alps to the patios of Seville; all, she had informed him, with a personal association: "she was no photograph fiend." Several artist's sketches arrested her guest's attention and he wondered what her life in Paris had been. He fancied that her three years abroad were full of curious chapters, most of them untold; but although she mystified him he could not associate her with license of any sort. There was even a hint of austerity about her, as if she drew strength from her Puritan forefathers.

It was patent, however, that she felt herself entitled to physical comforts after the labors of her day. There were half a dozen easy-chairs and a big divan covered with cushions. The carpet and cushions were red, but although the room was delightfully comfortable and homelike it might have been a bachelor's, so entirely were lacking all the little devices of femininity. The only ornaments in the room were an odd assortment of Tyrolese

pipes and Indian baskets. On a shelf above the divan, however, were many books, and Gwynne ran his eye over them. They included masterpieces of the modern Russian, German, French, and Italian schools; only three or four volumes of English criticism. A set of shelves opposite was filled with the standard English and American histories, essays, and novels, many of them old and bound in calf. The upper shelf was devoted entirely to the Russian novelists, and the bindings were new.

When Isabel came down, looking very pretty in a blue evening frock, simple enough to make her guest feel at ease in his travelling-clothes, but carefully selected with an eye to effect, she sent him up to her room to make his own simple toilet.

"I suppose I should furnish a spare room," she remarked. "But if I did I should have Paula—my adopted sister—and her family here whenever they happened to want to come, which would be always when I didn't want them. But you won't mind."

Gwynne made a wry face as he sat down before the dressing-table that he might reflect his visage while he brushed his hair. Nevertheless, he cast about a curious and apologetic eye, in the belief that a woman's bedroom must reveal some secret of her personality. This bedroom was so simple and girlish that it gave him a vague sense of pleasure. The windows and dressing-table were covered with white muslin, and there was a canopy of the same above the little brass bedstead. The flounces were so full and fluffy that he held his knees back nervously lest he should disturb a puff. There was no other furniture in the room but two rocking-chairs, and the only color was in the blue Japanese rugs scattered over the white matting,

and in two immense bows above the dressing-table and bed. He decided, as he ran down the stairs to the warm room below, that she understood both taste and comfort, and looked forward to his own lonely ranch-house with more equanimity than when he had paid the bill.

IV

THERE were two miles between Rosewater and Old Inn, but although Isabel rode briskly and was sensible as ever of the keen buoyant quality of the morning air that so often filled her with a pagan indifference to the human side of life, her thoughts were with the pleasant evening by her fireside, the supper in the low raftered room which once had been the office of the hotel—a supper of fried chicken, transparent asparagus, and soda biscuit, which Gwynne had disposed of with a school-boy's enthusiasm—the hundred and one impersonal topics they had discussed in a cloud of smoke before the logs, until Abe, the second hired man—who was to drive Gwynne in to Rosewater — had opened the kitchen door three times and coughed. Not since Isabel's return to California had she sat at a fireside and talked to anybody; nor, indeed, with the exception of her father in his lucid intervals, and her uncle in his rare moments of expansion, had she ever talked with any one that covered the large range of her own interests. Gwynne had snapped the lock on his unquiet spirit, but in that comfortable domestic environment, half lying in an easy-chair, with his gaze travelling indolently between the fire and the animated face of his cousin, he had talked of her favorite books and told her much of lands she had never visited. He had transferred himself to the buggy with a grumble of disgust, and begged

her to come for him early in the morning. He refused to pay his first visit to his ranch without her; and she had promised that Abe should go early for his saddle-horse and meet her at the hotel.

Pleasurable as the evening had been, Isabel was not in a sentimental frame of mind; she was stirred at the prospect of a companion, and wondered that she had been content in her solitude so long. Solitude and complete liberty might be indispensable elements in her ideal of mortal existence, but desultory companionship might be as necessary to intensify them.

It was nearly a year since her return, and outside of the bank parlor and Judge Leslie's office, she had held naught but business converse with any man. Nor with any woman. Although Rosewater society offered her nothing and she was glad to live out of town, still she liked her old school friends and had expected them to call on her. But weeks had passed and not one of them had paid her the mere civilities. She met them sometimes on Saturday afternoons, when all the world of Rosewater shopped on Main Street, and they invariably greeted her with effusion, and assured her they were "going out soon." Finally, busy and absorbed as she was, she fell a prey to curiosity. She knew that the young men had always rather feared her, as she had a forbidding reputation in the way of "bookishness"; and as most of them had either left Rosewater or married, in the four years of her absence, she had expected nothing from them. But the girls? The young married women, who had been her comrades at the High School? Did they resent her three years abroad and the sense of superiority implied? It was patent from their manner that they resented nothing. Did they disapprove

of her becoming so energetic a business woman? It was true that the girls of California's country towns, except when forced by poverty to work, were the laziest mortals on earth. But nothing could exceed their good-nature and entire indifference. Isabel might have started a race-track or opened a livery-stable and they would have vaguely admired, and been thankful that themselves were as God made them. Her friend Anabel Colton was in the south with an ailing child, and Mrs. Leslie was with her, or the problem would have been quickly solved.

One morning she met the beauty of Rosewater on Main Street, Miss Dolly Boutts, a girl who had been half grown when she left, but one of her own rapturous admirers. Main Street was crowded, but Miss Boutts rushed up and kissed her, protesting that she had been trying for two months to get out to see her. Isabel guided her firmly to an ice-cream table in the candy store, and while Miss Boutts, who was a superb specimen of animal beauty with a corresponding appetite, disposed of two saucers of the delectable and a plate of cakes, Isabel dived to the heart of the mystery.

She began by dilating upon her pleasure in being home again, and then congratulated her handsome friend, with a touch of sarcasm, upon the overwhelming gayeties of Rosewater.

Miss Boutts stared. "Gayeties?" said she.

"What else? I never knew people so absorbed, although I fail to see why I should be wholly excluded. Or have the fashions changed, and was I expected to call first—"

Miss Boutts, who was not particularly quick of apprehension, here threw back her head and gave a musical

laugh, which was out of tune with her drawling nasal voice and abundant slang.

"You innocent!" she cried. "Where have you been? I suppose you have been imagining us at dances and dinners and teas and things. Why, we have only danced twice in two whole years. It's cards, my dear. We are card mad, the whole bunch of us, old and young, women and girls. Mrs. Leslie and Anabel Colton are about the only exceptions, at least in our set. But I fancy the whole town has got it. We play morning, noon, and night—literally. Those who have no servants—and that question gets worse instead of better—don't make their beds for days, and their husbands get dinner at any old hour. Those who have a servant or two belong to six clubs at least. I belong to every one of them, and two meet in the morning."

It had been Isabel's turn to stare. The older people had always played bézique or whist, but rather somnolently of an evening. She wondered if the old gambling spirit had broken out again, and asked if they were playing poker or monté. Miss Boutts looked at her with positive scorn.

"You girls that go to Europe and stay there too long get fearfully behind things. Poker! Monté! We play bridge and five hundred." Then her genuine affection for Isabel overcame her contempt. "We have spoken often of asking you to join the clubs," she added, sweetly. "But there isn't a vacancy at present."

"I couldn't think of it. Chickens and cards don't rhyme. What do you play for—money?"

"No!" The scorn returned to her voice. "We are still too provincial for that. San Francisco is ahead

of us there. We don't even have real big prizes—just a dinky little spoon sitting up on the mantel-piece to excite us as if it was a tiara. I've won a whole bunch of them. They're better than nothing and mean a lot of fun. I'm as proud as punch of them."

"And the men?" asked Isabel. Did they play, too? Miss Boutts replied that they were too busy in the daytime, but were asked once a week to a "bang-up" affair. Their other evenings they spent at the lodges—"or any old place," added Miss Boutts, who had no brothers, and a very busy father. When Isabel asked her if she had not the natural yearning of her age and sex for beaux, she shrugged her shoulders and replied:

"Rather. But where are you going to find them here? Pa won't live in the city, and all the young men run away. Once in a while I visit in San Francisco, and we go down to all the new plays, so I suppose I'll meet my fate in time. Meanwhile, as there's nothing doing in that line here, cards are a mighty fine substitute for beaux, and no mistake."

Isabel had been glad to be rid of her, and of her other old friends, who did call in due course. Anabel had not returned and was the worst of correspondents. So it had fallen out that she had held no real converse with youth until Gwynne's advent, and she accepted it with delight, and shook her head with young triumph in being able to interest him—or in joy of the sparkling air; she hardly knew which.

As Gwynne left his room the Japanese "chambermaid," who had been about to knock, informed him that Miss Otis awaited him below. He ran down-stairs and

found her still on her horse. Abe held another horse by the bridle.

"It is nine o'clock—" began Isabel, but Gwynne interrupted her, rarely apologetic.

"I hardly slept. There was such an infernal racket. A theatrical troupe—"

"There generally is. How do you like your horse?"

Gwynne examined the horse, and was good enough to remark that it was a credit to California. Then he added: "It did not occur to me last night—my luggage is expressed to the ranch and I haven't my riding-togs—" Then he reddened at Isabel's gay laugh and Abe's suppressed smile.

"Oh, well," said Isabel, as she sprang from her horse. "The bloods will be too busy to notice as we ride down Main Street, and after that it won't matter."

She went with him into the dining-room of the hotel, a room scrupulously clean, but with no attempt at decoration beyond the various advertisements of beer on the white walls. There was a long table down the middle of the room and a great many small ones. Most of the latter were empty, although two beside the door were covered with steaks and eggs and coffee and rolls. One man, who had evidently finished, had swung his chair about, tipped it against the wall, and was addressing a political monologue to his toothpick.

Gwynne led Isabel to a table in a corner by a window, and indicated the company occupying more than half of the long table.

"'Busted,' was the word they used, and I cannot think of a better one to describe them. I talked with the men in the bar, and later wandered into the parlor where the

women were, some tearful, others indignant. One had an infant, and there were several small children running about, although it was midnight. The soubrette was chewing gum and anathematizing Rosewater as the 'jayest town on the slope,' and others were calling for the blood of the manager, who had absconded with the receipts of an unprofitable week. They interested me, as all your weird specimens do, and I found them a surprisingly decent lot, considering that it is the cheapest sort of a vaudeville troupe. That poor little woman with the red eyes and the parti-colored hair is the mother of the infant. I saw one of the children carrying it about the hall as I left my room. She wears spangled tights—she told me with a lively regret at the prospect of pawning them—and shoots balls from the head of that young man that looks like a parson. And the soubrette—all my ideals are shattered! Look at her."

The soubrette had a lank young body neatly attired in a store suit and shirt-waist. Her face was sallow and her black hair as lank as her body, but her eyes were keen and bright, and she was indisputably respectable. She was drinking her coffee with both elbows on the table and listening with a sort of indifferent sympathy to an elderly untidy woman who was sniffling.

"Drop it," she shot out, finally. "'Tain't worth it. The landlord's given us a free breakfast, anyhow, and it's more'n most of 'em does. We'll get back to 'Frisco somehow, and will run into Jake first thing. I'll give him a slice of my mind right in the thickest of the Tenderloin. You just shut up and be thankful you ain't got no kids."

"She is positively discouraging," said Gwynne, as he attacked his excellent breakfast. "I thought that the frozen

surface of the American woman thawed on the stratum soubrette."

"The class is not always remarkable for its asceticism," said Isabel, dryly. "I often lunch here, and see many varieties. The leading lady is generally a large voluptuous person with a head like a hay-stack seen through the wrong end of an opera-glass, and some of the soubrettes are all hats and eyes and wriggling grace. The men are what we call 'tough,' which is not exactly what you mean by 'toff.' Occasionally, however, there are the most respectable family parties, including the children whom they won't be parted from. We have three places of amusement, including quite a fine opera-house, so they do very well, as a rule. Was it your sympathy that kept you awake?"

"I am not an ass. But they were in and out of one another's rooms all night, and of course the baby cried. Then my room was over the bar—well, what will you? Such is life. I am sorry you cannot eat another breakfast. This seems to be the land of good cooking. If I did not scorn to be unoriginal I should dilate upon the pie and doughnuts I had for breakfast on the other side of your continent."

He seemed still light of heart at the sudden end to his wanderings and isolation, and they forgot the troupe and chatted about his ranch. He had much to ask and his sponsor more to tell.

The theatrical party appeared to finish their breakfast simultaneously. Three, including the soubrette, reached under the table, dislodged the morsel of gum they had mechanically attached to the under side of the board, closed on it with a snap, and filed out. Most of them

looked quite cheerful. Several bowed to Gwynne. The soubrette gave him a haughty suspicious nod.

"She looked at me like that last night," said Gwynne, complainingly. "What designs does she attribute to me? I never treated any one with more respect."

"They are all like that when they are respectable. Their fierce Americanism resents any hint of patronage. Later on they invite it. You will find these waitresses—the class, as a rule, is thoroughly decent—much the same in manner."

Two girls, white clad, their extended arms loaded with dishes, were stalking about the room, anæmic, disdainful. A portly woman, whom Isabel knew to be the mother of a brood, was far more anxious to please. She came up to the table in the corner and asked Gwynne affably if his coffee was "all right" and if he was a stranger in "these parts." He was under Isabel's amused eye, but he acquitted himself with credit; and when he rose from the table she thanked him indifferently for his tip, but her eyes glowed softly. It was rarely thought worth while to tip a mere waitress.

V

AS they rode slowly down the hill towards Main Street Gwynne examined his cousin from head to foot, but, he prided himself, out of the corner of his eye. She wore a dust-colored habit with divided skirt, and a soft felt hat and gloves of the same shade. Her horse was a very light chestnut, and he was obliged to confess that the effect was harmonious, although this Western style of riding by no means pleased his fastidious taste.

Isabel shot him an amused glance. "You don't approve of women riding astride," she said. "We invented it, although it is now the fashion in many other parts of America. Necessity is the mother of most fashions. Wait till you see our mountain roads. They are a disgrace to civilization—so broken and narrow that even in summer it is dangerous for a woman to ride a side-saddle, and in winter impossible. I have forgotten how, and that is the reason I never rode in England. . . . Here is the centre of your existence for several years to come. Main Street is to this section of the country what Wall Street is to the United States."

They had entered a street that turned abruptly in from the country a block below them, and rose gently for several hundred yards, when it straggled unevenly along a higher level, to melt into the older residence district and then out into the open country again. There was nothing quite like

this Main Street in California. At its southern end was a long double hitching-rail—as old as the State—already flanked by several dusty wagons and big strong horses. The long unbroken block had as many and as various stores as are generally spread over the entire area of a town. Jammed against one another like cabins opening out of a steamer's gangway, and yet of no mean size, were banks and saloons; stores for chicken feed, groceries, fruit, candy, jewelry, clothing, hats, fancy goods, stationery; and five drug stores with tiled floors. Many of the windows made a brave display that would not have disgraced San Francisco. The entire west pavement was roofed, making a promenade like a ship's deck against rain or the severities of summer; and from this roof depended an extraordinary number of signs, often eccentric of color and design. Above the buildings of the opposite side of the street rose the spars of several fishing-boats; the creek finished at Rosewater. Gwynne glanced about him with an interest that nothing else Californian save the Mission and San Francisco had inspired. Here was a bit of a civilization of a building era, that was almost old, everything being relative. At all events it was old-fashioned. It was thoroughly countrified and yet suggestive of the concentrated activities of a city. Isabel, after leaving the hotel had made a détour, giving him a brief glimpse of the town. On the higher streets—Rosewater lay on a cluster of gentle hills—between Main Street and the "residence" district, he had noticed several modern buildings of brick or stone: offices, churches, school-houses, a solid little opera-house of colonial design, a fine City Hall, and one of those forlorn "Carnegie Libraries" in a state of arrested development for want of funds, but with an imposing

façade and the name of the "donor" conspicuously advertised. All this had interested him little, although he had thought the town on its slopes looked very pretty and quiet; but this——the word "pioneer" suddenly came to him, and he looked up and down with a keenness of interest that was almost like a reviving memory. This beyond question was a remnant of the old thing, and here, no doubt, the great-grandfather whose first name he had forgotten, had been a familiar sight; his fortune and enterprise had helped to lay the very foundations of this landmark of a wild and stirring time.——Then they rode past a square park high on a terrace, walled up with stone most modernly, the green shaded with pines and palms, acacia and oaks; and the dream passed. At the same moment he became aware that his partner was talking.

"Rosewater is the financial and trading centre of an immense farming district. There are four banks, as solid as the best in the world. Three are as old as American California. The farmers come in daily for feed and supplies, the chicken-ranchers with their produce for the San Francisco buyers, and eggs for the great hatcheries. Many, like myself, find the last less trouble and expense than bothering with incubators. Something like four thousand dollars change hands daily in Rosewater, and it has less than five thousand inhabitants."

Having parted with her information she relapsed into silence, and, the town lying behind them, he transferred his attention to her. She looked severe, remote again, and he wondered if she would grow quite hard and business-like in time. In the hotel office as he paid his bill he had overheard one man say to another that she was "as good as the best, and no man could get ahead of her." In this

sexless get-up and with her features set she looked hardly a woman. She certainly had capacities for good-fellowship, and yesterday she had been almost tender. He had just decided that he would as soon marry a portrait of George Washington, when, in response to a light call behind them, Isabel wheeled about with the pink in her cheeks and eyes wide with pleasure. She galloped back to an approaching buggy, in which there was an extremely pretty golden-haired young woman, and as she and Isabel simultaneously alighted and flew into each other's arms, Gwynne also descended, prepared to raise his hat when his existence was recognized. For some moments the girls talked a rapid duet, then Isabel turned suddenly and beckoned.

"This is my oldest friend, Anabel—Mrs. Tom Colton," she said, apologetically. "She only returned last night—just caught sight of us, and followed."

Gwynne's disapproval vanished as he shook hands with the blooming young matron and met her bright laughing eyes. She was a small imposing creature and received him in quite the grand manner. Her accent of America was as slight as Isabel's, and she used no slang. There was about her something of the primness that characterizes American women in the smaller towns, but her simple linen frock had been cut by a master, and she looked so warm, so womanly, so hospitable as she welcomed Gwynne to Rosewater, that he liked her more spontaneously than he had liked anybody since he crossed the Atlantic, and was almost enthusiastic as he rode on with Isabel.

"Anabel is a perfect dear," said his companion, whose eyes and cheeks were still glowing, and who looked like a

mere girl. "I am much fonder of her than I am of Paula, although we haven't a thing in common. She was domestic and wild about children before she was done with dolls. Of course she married at once. When we were at the High School together she regarded my ambition to be first as a standing joke, and has never read anything heavier than a classic novel in her life. Why I am so fond of her I can't say, unless it is that she is absolutely genuine, and that counts more in the long-run than anything else. Besides, she was my first friend when I came here as a little girl. Her mother—Mrs. Leslie—belongs to one of the old San Francisco families, and had always known my mother. I love her as much as ever, but I am bound to confess that I have missed her little. I suppose complete happiness comes when you miss nobody."

They rode on in silence, for the heat was increasing and the dust lay thick on the road and swirled about their heads. There had been no rain since March, and the sea that sent its daily fogs and breezes to cool San Francisco and the towns about the bay was forty miles from Rosewater.

"Never mind," said Isabel, as Gwynne mopped his brow for the third time and ostentatiously rubbed his face. "The nights are cool and the hot weather will soon moderate down into the mellowness of October. When the rains come—well it is a toss up, which is worse—the dust or the mud."

"Heavens knows what we have swallowed," muttered Gwynne, who had served on sanitary boards and heard much talk of germs. But Isabel only laughed and told him to go to Anabel, who had a nostrum for every ill

A moment later the road led up a hill-side, and at the summit she caught his bridle and reined in.

"I brought you this roundabout way on purpose," she said. "Is it not what the poet would call a fair domain?"

Below them was a vast flat expanse bounded opposite by a mountain chain, that rose abruptly from the level, breaking into much irregularity of surface above, but all its hollows blurred with woods. Beyond a dip rose, far in the distance, a huge crouching formidable mass—St. Helena, named after a Russian princess, the wife of the last of the Russian governors of northern California. On the plain were golden fields, orchards, compact masses of the eucalyptus-tree planted as shelters for the cattle in time of storm or unbearable heat. Many cattle were roaming about; on the grazing land in the far distance towards the town of St. Peter—a mere white cluster in the north at the base of the range—were the horses. Over the mountains lay a shimmering haze, blue or pink; it was difficult to define whether the colors flowed through each other or subtly united.

"It is all yours," added Isabel, emerging from the rôle of the mere cicerone. "Are you not proud of it?"

Gwynne did in truth dilate, but hastily assured himself that it was at the beauty of his estate, not at its paltry nineteen thousand acres. Had he not shot over many an estate as large? Had not his grandfather come into four times that number? True, most of them had not been entailed, and this at least was his, his own. He quite realized it for the first time; even as a source of income he had barely given it a thought; even after Isabel's descriptions he had never exerted himself to picture it. As a resource in his crisis it was all very well, but not worth

while shaping into concrete form until he could avoid it no longer.

But now, as he gazed down and over the great beautiful expanse—for even the mountain-side and much beyond was his—he felt a sudden passionate gratitude to that Otis whose first name he had forgotten, pride fairly invaded his chest; then, as he realized that it was visibly swelling under Isabel's intent gaze, he blushed, laughed confusedly, turned away his head. But his annoyance was routed by a speechless amazement, for Isabel suddenly flung both arms round his neck and gave him a hearty kiss.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I never really liked you before, though I never denied you were interesting enough. Men are nothing but overgrown boys, only some are nice and some are not. You are. I'll really adopt you now, instead of merely doing my bounden duty. Now look at those mountains in the south."

More disturbed than he would have believed possible at the young warmth and magnetism of her embrace—although it was disconcertingly evident that she would have kissed a small boy in precisely the same manner—he composed his features to indifference and followed the motion of her whip.

In the dim perspective of the south she indicated Tamalpais and Monte Diablo opposite, vague dim blue masses behind San Francisco. "Monte Diablo and St. Helena are both old volcanoes," she continued. "I never say dead volcanoes after the history and performances of Vesuvius and Pelée. I wish one of our volcanoes would liven up. We might have fewer earthquakes—although, to be sure, ours are supposed to be caused by faulting—in so far as they know anything about it."

"Do you think of nothing but earthquakes out here? You have made at least three casual allusions since we met twenty-four hours ago, and in southern California they are a part of every tradition."

"If you had been brought up on earthquakes they would never be far from your own mind. There is a theory that the reason for Californians taking everything as it comes with a happy-go-lucky philosophy, lies in the electrical air and the eight months of sunshine; but I believe it is due even more to the earthquakes. If we can stand those we can stand anything. It is in tune with the old gambling spirit that still colors the country; no doubt has kept it alive. We never know what is going to happen next, and we don't care. *Vive la bagatelle.* We have more to be thankful for than the rest of the world, anyhow. Well, let us go down to the house."

The house with its out-buildings stood below them on a high knoll, three sides surrounded by a grove of white oaks, the other open to the mountains, although the front veranda was shaded by several spreading trees, far apart. The large soft leaves and the pendent moss of the oaks were gray with dust, but the shade was cool and delicious. Down in the valley an old comrade here and there helped to tell the story of the time when all these miles of valley and mountain were unbroken forest, known only to the red man. And that was not a century ago.

The house was frankly ugly, like all the farm-houses of its era, although vastly to be preferred to the "artistic" structures succeeding them. As the couple gave up their horses to a stately Jap, who had been engaged by Isabel as butler, chambermaid, valet, and footman, and entered the large living-room, Gwynne generously gave voice to

his approval. There were books to the ceiling, easy-chairs, the photographs of friends that had decorated his rooms in London and Capheaton. His eyes contracted as he saw a pile of London newspapers on the table, and he turned away hastily and remarked that he was glad the fittings were red, as it would be more companionable in winter; the rest of the year he should live out-of-doors. The veranda, which surrounded the house, was quite wide enough to live on, and below it was a border of garden full of old-fashioned flowers. The bedrooms, gayly furbished with chintz and matting, were up-stairs.

"I didn't think it worth while to furnish a dining-room," said Isabel as they returned to the lower floor. "It has always been the custom to eat at the end of the living-room —when they didn't eat in the kitchen. And what more dreary than to take your meals in a big country dining-room by yourself! All the rooms here are large."

She took him into the kitchen and introduced him to his cook, a stout Mexican woman, who received him with excessive dignity, and wore nothing but a single calico garment open to the chest. Then they mounted their horses again and Isabel escorted him down to the great hay-barns, the dairy, and cattle-sheds, introducing him to his hired men, who looked him over frankly, but, somewhat to his surprise, addressed him as "sir." He commented upon the unexpected deference as they rode back to the house.

"Oh, these country folk are naturally polite," said Isabel, dryly. "They are not yet entirely corrupted by the yellow press, although independent enough, as you will discover. Tact will manage any one. I have been

managing people all my life, and have prepared this force to like you. Now I must be off. I am to lunch with Anabel."

"You are not going to leave me!" cried Gwynne, in dismay.

"The tragic moment must come sooner or later," she said, gayly. "And you have forgotten your mail. It is somewhere under all those newspapers. I'll ride out in a day or two and see how you are getting on."

She gave him a cavalier little nod, touched her horse with the whip, and a moment later was lost in a cloud of dust. Gwynne, angry and disappointed, looked after her a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and went in to his mail.

VI

MRS. TOM COLTON lived on one of the higher slopes of Rosewater in a charming little double house all brown shingles and big chimneys. Opposite was the paternal mansion on a high terrace, a modern Renaissance structure, painted white and shaded with gigantic palms and acacias. There was a porte-cochère but no balcony.

All the "residences" of this quarter were modern and "artistic," even the cottages; it was only on the lower slopes, close to the nucleus of the town, that the many old fashioned structures were but occasionally thrown out of tune by a pile of shingles and stone. But all had gardens, and there were several squares whence the streets radiated with as puzzling an irregularity as London's own, but set thick with shade trees tropical and boreal. On the high rim of the hills enclosing the town were many small farms, and all were white with the Leghorn that laid the golden eggs. These looked like a light fall of snow on the sunburned hills, and were as refreshing as the garden trees upon which the hose played night and morning.

As Isabel left her horse at a livery-stable and walked up the wide clean boulevard towards her friend's house, she met no one on the glaring pavements, although here and there a buggy was hitched, and a patient horse stood with his fore feet on the line of grass beside the concrete,

his head under a tree, and his eyes fixed expectantly upon the door of the house. Indeed one might walk here at almost any hour of the day and rarely meet another; all the energies were concentrated in Main Street, although it was the town's standing grievance that it was not the county-seat with a court-house that should make the pretensions of St. Peter ridiculous. No small part of those energies in the business district were devoted to humbling the rival, in the matter of commerce. St. Peter retaliated with the accent of a fierce contempt. "Chickenville!" "The Eggopolis!" quoth the local wits, and who shall say that the darts did not quiver and sting, although the more flourishing community never lowered its self-satisfied front? Even the rich banker families were not at the trouble to put on airs. They did not possess a handsome turnout between them, and as for dress there were few that did more than keep themselves cool in summer and warm in winter. It was true that Mr. Boutts possessed a runabout automobile in which he bumped his family to San Francisco occasionally, but he was of the newer gentry and owed his social pre-eminence to his wife and pretty daughter, and to his conversion from the Congregational to the Episcopal Church.

Isabel, of course, was a conspicuous member of the ancient aristocracy, by virtue of her forefathers having owned half the county when the smoke still rose from the wigwam; and although Mrs. James Otis had maintained a haughty aloofness on her husband's ranch in summer, and later in a Rosewater cottage, her neighbors thought none the less of her for that, and Isabel, after school hours, played with their children. Later, even the transgressions of her father, and her unchaperoned trip to Europe, left

her position secure. An Otis was an Otis. *Noblesse oblige.* Aristocracies are aristocracies the world over.

Mrs. Tom saw Isabel coming and opened the door herself; then as lunch would not be ready for an hour, led her up to her large sunny bedroom, where her three children, pretty fragile creatures in spite of their tan, sweet-fed and spoiled, were playing on the floor. Isabel tossed and kissed them, presenting them with a box of toys she had bought in Main Street. Then she sat down with Anabel in the window to have a long talk. But she quickly discovered that Anabel talked with one wing of her brain, so to speak, and her roving gaze beamed constantly at the noisy brood on the floor. Complacency, maternity, happiness, radiated from all her sweet womanly little person, but in half an hour Isabel was casting about for an excuse to leave directly after luncheon, although she had promised to spend the day. As Anabel babbled on, while embroidering a little frock, relating anecdotes of her marvellous children, commenting upon the increasing extortions of the labor class, the iniquities of servants, the mounting of prices in California, and the shocking mania for cards that possessed Rosewater in common with the rest of the world, there stole over Isabel a feeling of intolerable ennui. She had felt it often enough in her sister's uneven domestic atmosphere, and now and again in more regulated interiors, but never had the wings of her spirit beaten so furiously as in this happy home of the most beloved of her friends. The wave ebbed when the nurse came and carried off the protesting trio, and as she sat with Anabel in the beautiful little dining-room panelled and furnished with redwood, highly polished, the table set with silver and crystal, the dainty meal beyond criticism and served by a



noiseless Chinaman, she was able to feel grateful that Anabel was as happy in her way as herself in her own, and praised everything with such warmth that the placid little lady waxed radiant. Mrs. Tom was very golden-haired and blue-eyed and pink and white, but none was further removed from insipidity than she. Her features were strong, particularly her mouth and chin, and she had a repose of manner, a squareness of shoulder, and a serenity of expression that gave her an almost solid appearance. It was patent that she was making a success of her life, and Isabel kissed her at parting with a hearty good-will; but only the excessive dignity inherited from her Spanish ancestors arrested a war-whoop as she almost ran down the hill. She had been detained until five o'clock in spite of ingenious excuses, and when she mounted her horse she galloped for the country at such a rate of speed that the drowsy town turned over. When she reached a long and lonely stretch of road she indulged herself in snatches of Spanish songs, and when she was at home she did not go to bed till near midnight, so happy was she in the contemplation of her solitude.

VII

GWYNNE found few letters awaiting him; he had not encouraged correspondence, and only his mother, Flora Thangue, and his solicitors knew his address. It had been announced and reiterated in London that he was making a tour of the world. During the first month of his absence Lady Victoria had sent him a large bundle of clippings from newspapers, some acid in comment upon his devious intention of neglecting his duties as a peer of the realm, his fruitless exposure of a chagrin at an elevation in which he would find more and more consolation as time went on. A few were sympathetic. Others went so far as to indicate a program in which he might serve his country with modesty, if not with the scintillations of the free-lance; and reminded him that peers had risen to the post of prime-minister ere this, of viceroy, lord-lieutenant, governor-general, and ambassador. Then, apparently, they dismissed him. The fiscal question was acute. Dissolution threatened. There were bright particular stars still in both parties, and the press and public had enough to do with sitting in judgment upon their respective rays.

In the two letters from his mother, written at Homburg, there was no news beyond the letting of the properties and a bulletin of her health, which promised an imminent fitness for travel. His solicitors wrote that the income

from the two estates was ample to keep the numerous women of the family in comfort, and leave a surplus which should be paid to his mother, according to his directions. This, with the southern ranch and the San Francisco property, should yield her an income of two thousand five hundred pounds a year. The confidential member of the firm hinted that if his lordship found means of increasing her ladyship's income in that land of gold and plenty it would be wise to do so, as her ladyship knew less than nothing of economy and was even more deeply in debt than usual.

He missed Flora's gay letter of gossip, and looked with narrowing lids at the pile of newspapers. None had been sent him before, and he had left not a subscription behind him; but it was evident that his mother and Flora were under the mistaken impression that he would welcome this greeting in his new home. They had accumulated for a month. He recognized the type of the leading dailies, and could guess the names of the numerous illustrated weeklies. Suddenly he took them in his arms and walked quickly over to the stove, his eye roving in search of a match-box. But even as he stooped he rose again, and, blushing for his weakness, carried them back to the table, tore them open with nervous haste. He skimmed the great pages of the dailies from start to finish, telling himself that he must have a breath from home, news from authoritative sources, stated in excellent English; sickened with the knowledge that he was but searching eagerly for a word of himself; sickening more when he found none. Then he fell upon the weeklies, his eye glancing indifferently from the paragraphs and presentments of the royal and the engaged, but scanning every

personality. He had had one rival and there was much of him.

Before he had finished the third his struggling pride conquered. He gathered the heap and flung it into a corner, then caught up his hat and struck out for the loneliest part of the ranch. He writhed in the throes of disappointment, jealousy, disgust of self. He attempted consolation by picturing all the other ambitious men he knew exhibiting a similar weakness and vanity when there was no eye to see. His imagination did not rise to marvellous feats—and what if it did not? He had never aspired to be in the same class with other men.

The bitter tide receded only to give place to apprehension. His temperament was mercurial, balanced by a certain languor in the earlier stages of emotion, and there had been little to depress his spirit during those thirty years when all the fairies had danced attendance on him; even defeat had but intoxicated his fighting instinct and given another excuse for flattery and encouragement. During the eleven months since he had left England he had experienced neither encouragement nor flattery. He could not recall having made a profound impression upon any of his casual acquaintances; he certainly had created no sensation. It was true that his rôle had been that of the listener, the student, but he had so long accepted himself as a personality, as the most remarkable of England's younger productions, that he had been deeply mortified more than once at the cavalier treatment of middle-aged business men with no time to waste upon a young Britisher of no possible use to them.

To-day he boldly faced the haunting doubt if he were really a great man; if his success in England, as well as his

phenomenal self-confidence, had not been merely the result of an inordinate ambition fed by fortuitous circumstances. He recalled that from childhood his grandfather and his mother had practically decreed that the bright, lovable, mischievous boy was to be a great man; that as he grew older the entire family connection joined the conspiracy. It is easy enough to believe in yourself when the world believes in you, and easy enough to make the world take you at your own valuation when you have a powerful backing, a reasonable amount of cleverness, a sublime audacity, the power of speech, and a happy series of accidents. Were all great men two-thirds accidental or manufactured? He felt inclined to believe it, but while it soothed his torn and throbbing pride, it by no means lessened his apprehension.

Was he not a great man, even so? He felt anything but a great man at the moment. He recalled that he had indulged in few lapses into complacency since his departure incognito from England, and that he had deliberately held self-analysis at bay by incessant travel and a compulsory interest in subjects that did not appeal to him in the least. It was this absence of interest after close upon a year in the country that appalled him as much as his inner visioning. He hated the country. He hated its politics, both parties impartially. He hated all the questions that absorbed the American mind, from graft to negroes. He had sat in the Congressional galleries in Washington, attended political meetings wherever he could obtain admittance, studied the press in even the smaller towns, travelled through the South and relieved himself of whatever abstract sympathy he may have cherished for the colored race, visited the sweat-shops of New York, the meat-

packing establishments of Chicago, the factories of New England, every phase of the great civilization he knew of; and while he found much to admire and condemn, both left him evenly indifferent. With all his soul he longed for England. She might have her selfishness and her snobberies, lingering taints in her political system, but she stood at the apex of civilization, and her very faults were interesting; far removed from the brazen crudities of the New World's struggle for wealth and power. And although the blood of reformers was in his veins, and in his secret soul he was an idealist to the point of knight-errantry, the desire for reform had ebbed out of him during his American exile. And he knew the fate of a good many American reformers. There were several in high places at present, cheerfully trimmed down from the statesman to the political ideal. Julia Kaye—clever woman!—had put the matter into an epigram. The American statesman was the superior politician.

And how was he, out of tune with every phase of the country, to find the ghost of an opportunity to lead it? He was no actor. If he had a merit it was sincerity, a contempt for subterfuge as beneath both his powers and the lofty position to which he had been born. Moreover, he was honest; an equally aristocratic failing and drawback.

He recalled a conversation he had held in the smoking-compartment of a Pullman with a sharp young politician, who had become voluble after Gwynne had "stood him" two high-balls.

"It's graft or quit," he had announced. "All this cleaning up in insurance and what not, all this talk of curbing the trusts and the rest of it don't fool yours truly one little bit. It's just the ins trying to get ahead of the outs.



It's not the honestest or the best man that gets there in God's own country, but the smartest—every time. Those that are crying the loudest against the grafters are just waiting for a chance to graft good and hard themselves. I am, and I don't care who knows it. Only I don't waste any strength kicking. The labor party works itself up over trusts and capitalists, and most of the capitalists come out of that factory, and are the first to grind those left behind them, under both heels. They know what I know, and what you'll know before you get through, that the only fun in life is to be got out of power and money."

The face as sharp as a razor but by no means dishonest rose before Gwynne. He had been a very decent little chap, and in the two days they had travelled together he had displayed a photograph of his wife and "kids," to whom he seemed even sentimentally devoted. Although Gwynne had parted from the man with satisfaction it was impossible to despise him utterly. Since then he had met many of his kind, more or less honest, able, pettily ambitious, fairly educated, unlearned on every subject except politics and the general business of the country; and all equally unsympathetic. He made no pretence to judge the country on its social or intellectual side, for he had been forced to avoid all groups that might have enlightened him—although he found no difficulty in assuming that well-bred and intellectual people were much the same the world over, and was willing to give the United States the benefit of every doubt. But its obvious side was the one that concerned him and his career. In order to succeed—and without success life would mean less than nothing to him—must he in a measure conform to conditions that were the result of a century of complexities?

He recurred to the dry biographical sketches he had received, from certain of his travelling companions, of the most distinguished—and successful!—men in American politics to-day. Their ideals and their zeal for reform had played between horizon and zenith like a flaming sword, so compelling the attention of all that would pause to look that the diminishing effulgence had been even more conspicuous; and now, although the sword was occasionally brandished for form's sake, and was even sharper than before, having learned to cut both ways, it had the rust of tin not of blood on it, and deceived no one. But it had served its purpose—if to be sure it had been needed at all—and its owners were past-masters of success. Had he in him the makings of the mere trimmer and politician, in addition to the miserable vanity that had riven him to-day? And would some measure of great success won on those lines stir the dormant greatness in him?—if there were any greatness to stir. This was the fearful doubt, after all, that beset him. He almost saw with his outer vision his ideals lying in a tumbled heap, as he felt himself on the point of crying aloud that to feel once more that sense of power which had exalted him above mere mortals, and given him an ecstasy of spirit that no other passion could ever excite, he would sacrifice everything, everything!

He paused abruptly and looked about him. He was half-way up the mountain. The great valley, that looked as if it might embrace the State itself, lay before him. North and south the scenery was magnificent, ethereal in the distance, melting everywhere into one of those lovely mists that seem to have extracted the spiritual essence of all the colors. But the very beauty of his new domain added to the sense of unreality, of uneasiness, that had so often

possessed him since he had crossed the borders of the State. And it was all on such a colossal scale. There could never be anything friendly, anything possessing, in a land destined for a race of primeval giants. He felt so passionate a longing for the sweet embracing historied landscapes of England that the very violence of the nostalgia drove him homeward with the half-formed intention of taking the first train for New York and the first steamer out of it. Moreover, he was suddenly obsessed with the belief that if he had greatness in him England alone held its magnet.

But it was a long walk to his house, and he reached it late in the afternoon, very tired and very hungry. When he entered his comfortable living-room, redolent of flowers, he received something like a shock of peace, and after he had taken a cold bath, he cursed himself roundly for permitting the mixed blood in his veins to contrive at times the temperament of an artist or of some women. As he sat down to a more than palatable supper, he felt thankful that he had had it out with himself so early in the engagement, and thought it odd if the Anglo-Saxon in him could not drive rough-shod over his weaker outcroppings.

VIII

HE did not see Isabel again for three weeks. Several days after his arrival he received a note from her, briefly stating that she was starting for Los Angeles to exhibit her prize Favarolles and Leghorns at a "Chicken show," and after that would pay a long deferred visit to her sister. "But I shall not be long," she added, possibly with a flicker of contrition, "only they have been planning things for me for ages and I am always putting them off. I will spend a week—not with them, exactly, but at their disposal, and it will be a relief to have it over."

Gwynne felt himself ill-treated, but shrugged his shoulders with a new philosophy not all doggedness, and easily stretched to embrace the vagaries of woman. And, in truth, he found an abundance of occupation. Ascertaining that Mr. Leslie was away, he spent his time on the ranch, examining its various yields, divisions, possibilities; to say nothing of its books and history. The dairy was now an insignificant affair, experiments having proved disastrous, and his superintendent advised him to let it remain so. The greatest yield was in hay, and cattle raised for the market. The last lessee had come to grief over blood horses, and Gwynne's agents had accepted what remained of the racers and breeders in default of apocryphal cash. Although advised that they could be sold to advantage if haste were not imperative, Gwynne, who had

a large balance in the bank, determined to continue the experiment. Many acres of the ranch were profitably let, although by the month only, as pasture both for cows and horses. The orchards always made a handsome yield, and the vegetable garden and strawberry beds needed only proper care to become remunerative. Moreover, several acres had recently been planted with kale, a favorite food of the conquering Leghorn, and there were fine runs on the hills that might be fenced off for sheep—or chickens; but at this point the superintendent always detected something even defiant in his employer's cold indifference, and told his friends that the Englishman was "haughty in spots."

It was all very satisfactory, but in order to bring him a really considerable increase of income he must dismiss his superintendent—who now drew a salary of a hundred and fifty dollars a month, and who did not inspire him with unbounded trust—and become his own manager, an office which would not only make heavy demands upon his time, turning him virtually into a farmer, with little leisure for the reading and practice of law, but no doubt involve the sacrifice of money as well; he did not flatter himself that he could learn to "run" a ranch of nineteen thousand varied acres in a season. His superintendent was a half-breed Mexican, the son of his cook, quick, voluble, and experienced in the ways of the ranch, upon which he had worked since boyhood. Gwynne had called on Mr. Colton at the bank two days after his arrival, and the old gentleman, who had an eye like a gimlet and a mouth like a steel trap, had consigned all "greasers" to subterranean fires, and emphasized the fact that he had hired Carlos Smith by the month only. A better man would demand

a year's contract. There were infinite possibilities for "the greaser" to pocket a goodly share of the profits, and "cover up his tracks." And it might be a year or two before a superintendent could be found capable in every way of managing so complicated a ranch.

While he was still revolving the problem he met Mr. Leslie and Tom Colton, who advised him to sell at least half the ranch to small farmers. Properties of four and five acres were in increasing demand in this fertile county, and equally difficult to obtain. He had but the one interview with them, as they were starting the same day to attend to some business in the north, but after revolving the matter in all its bearings for another ten days he made up his mind to accept their advice, consoled his crestfallen superintendent with the promise of constant work, and set forth one afternoon to place his advertisements.

He had visited the town but twice since his arrival, and then in the morning. To-day he saw it characteristically for the first time. The hills that formed a cove of the great valley were bright with their houses and gardens, but very quiet. The long sloping block of Main Street was crowded with wagons, buggies, and horses, that from a distance looked to be a solid mass; and even when he rode into their midst he found some difficulty in forcing his way. Where the dusty vehicles were not moving they were tied to every post, the horses with their front feet on the sidewalk observing the familiar throng with friendly patient eyes. The shops were doing a rushing business, and so, Gwynne inferred, were the banks. As for the saloons, their doors swung with mechanical precision. Most of the farmers wore linen dusters and broad straw hats, but their women had put on all their finery. The girls of the town could

be readily distinguished by their crisp muslins and white hats and absence of dust. There were groups of Rose-water girls holding rendezvous with their country cousins everywhere, although for the most part in the drug stores, which, with their tiled floors and ample space, looked like public reception-rooms. There were many knots of men under the broad roof over the pavement, but in spite of the ubiquitous saloon no drunkenness. Nor was there a policeman in sight. Nor a shop for fire-arms. Gone were the old days when a man drank till his brain was fire and his pistol went off by itself. The sting had been extracted from California and she had settled down to practical consideration of her vast resources; and in the comfortable assurance that there was enough for all. Gwynne had not seen a beggar nor a pauper since his arrival.

He placed his advertisements with both the local newspapers, to avoid the ill-will of either, posted others to the San Francisco press, and was riding down Main Street in order to have a closer look at the long hitching-rail lined on either side with another solid mass of horses and vehicles, when he caught sight of Isabel driving a buggy and evidently searching for an empty post. He laid aside his grievance and made his way to her side. She quite beamed with welcome, and they disentangled themselves into a side street, where there were empty posts.

"I only got home at half-past eleven last night," she informed him. "The boat was three hours late in starting, and when I finally made up my mind to come by train the last had gone. So I overslept this morning or I should have gone out to see you. But I meant to telephone you from her and ask you to come out for the first duck-shooting—"

"Duck-shooting!" Gwynne forgot the grievance.

"The season opens to-day—the fifteenth of October. I had meant really to ask you for the first thing this morning. Never mind, we have plenty of time, and you will not have to go home for anything. Just wait here until I do my errands."

He tied his horse next to hers and sat down in the shade on a chair provided by a friendly store-keeper. In less than half an hour she returned, and they started for Old Inn. Isabel had never seemed so charming to him as they rode slowly out of the town and along the dusty road. Smiling and sparkling, she asked him rapid eager questions about his ranch, his plans, his comforts, whom he had met, how he had passed his days and evenings. The truth was she had practically forgotten him, and her conscience smote her. Her week in San Francisco had waxed to a fortnight, for she had enjoyed herself far more than was usual in the company of her relatives. Lyster Stone was one of the most agreeable of men when debts were not more than usually pressing, and as he had just painted a drop curtain and sold a picture for a considerable sum, he had replenished his own elaborate wardrobe, given his wife a new frock, silenced the loudest of his creditors, and thought it worth while to "blow the rest in" on a sister-in-law who seemed to have no taste for matrimony. Moreover, he really liked and admired her, and he liked still more to spend money. When his pockets were full of actual coin he abandoned himself to sheer happiness. Debt had bred philosophy; moreover, his wife relieved him of too depressing a contact with duns, and there were times when his respite was longer than he deserved. If his Paula had a little way of cajoling the amount out of her sister's

pocket, why not? He had never refused a friend in need, and, in truth, could see no use for money except to spend it. If all the world did not wag his way, so much the worse for cold-blooded mercenary superfluous beings. So, the two weeks had been a round of dinners at the gay Bohemian restaurants, chafing-dish suppers at his own and other studios, the theatre and opera, and long walks about the brilliant streets at night. It was all the more interesting to Isabel from its odd wild likeness to foreign life. She had heard much of this European "continental" flavor of San Francisco life, only to be tasted by artificial light, and she had given herself up to it with an abandon of which she possessed a sufficient reserve. But one cloud had risen on the blue, and as it emptied itself in a torrent, it was a matter for congratulation that it had tarried the fortnight.

A woman of growing wealth, who affected artists' society, had continued to live in her pretty odd little house, but had recently done it up like a stuffed and scented jeweller's box. The tiny salon was her pride. It was all cherry satin and white lace, the furniture lilliputian, to match the proportions of the room and the lady. She was large-eyed, dark-haired, pretty, and the room set her off admirably. It was here that she invariably received her artist friends, and felt herself at last set in a definite niche, in the city of individualities. One day, in a spasm of generosity, she bade Stone, calling in a mood of unusual depression, to paint it, and sell for his own benefit what, at least, should be a glowing bit of still life. Stone began his work next day, meaning, when the seductive interior was finished, to induce his patron to sit on the doll-like sofa for a portrait, irresistible alike to her vanity and pocket.

But she capriciously went off to New York for clothes, and he exhibited the picture in the shop of a dealer where buyers were not infrequent. Thence, indeed, in the course of a few days went a wealthy broker whose sign was three balls. He liked the picture, but bargained that himself should sit on the sofa. His offer was generous. Stone, to do him justice, demurred, for all Bohemia, at least, knew the room. But Mrs. Paula wept at the thought of the lost hundreds, and he succumbed. The result, at the owner's insistence, was exhibited. The lady returned as unexpectedly as she had flown, and was asked at every step if she had "seen her room." Scenting mystery, she went to the gallery; and stood petrified before the faithful presentment of her cherry-colored satin boudoir, the very edge of the sofa accommodating a large gentleman with an eminent nose, a bulging shirt-front—diamond-studded—and knees long severed. He looked like a Hebraic Gulliver in Lilliput, and the unities were in tatters. She stared, stuttered, wept. And then she descended upon Stone.

Gwynne laughed heartily as Isabel related the episode, but they fell into silence after they crossed the bridge and were able to accelerate their pace. He made no effort to break it, although Isabel had never found him more polite. She also thought him vastly improved with his thick coat of tan, and almost picturesque in his khaki riding-clothes and high boots. There were more subtle changes in him which it was too warm and dusty to speculate upon at the moment.

Gwynne had restrained his spontaneous delight in seeing Isabel again. Not only did he have a genuine grievance in her neglect of him, but he had no intention that she should fancy he had need of anything she could give him,

beyond superficial companionship and advice. More than once during the past weeks he had caught himself longing so miserably for her sympathy and the support of her strong independent character that it had alarmed him. He realized for the first time what a prop and resource the deep maturity and scornful strength of his mother had been. He must brace and reinforce his character at all points if he persisted in his determination to achieve the colossal task he had set for himself. Woman's sympathy was all very well for some men, or for him in more toward circumstances, but he had looked deeply into himself and been terrified at unsuspected weaknesses. He had set his teeth and determined to fight his fight alone. If he failed, at least he would have the consolation of never having cried out to a woman: "Give me your help! I need you!"

He did not betray the least of this, but his first remark as they rested the horses on the slight hill leading to Isabel's ranch was less irrelevant than it may have seemed to himself.

"I suppose you met all sorts of interesting Johnnies in that beloved San Francisco of yours," he said, abruptly.

"Of course. It will be quite cool in an hour and we can go out. Fortunately I never gave away Uncle Hiram's shooting-togs, and he was quite your height and figure. We'll take tea and sandwiches with us so that we need not hurry home for supper."

She suddenly forgot the ducks and pointed with her whip at the low hills behind her house. The runs were covered with several thousand snow-white, red-combed chickens, and all their little white houses shone in the sun. The effect was by no means inartistic, but Gwynne elevated his nose. He hated the sight of chickens.

"Did you ever see anything more beautiful than that?" asked Isabel, proudly. "They all know me, and I love every one of them."

"I don't doubt there is money in them," said Gwynne, dryly. "But as a pet I should prefer even a cat."

"Oh, I only pet them when they are ill. There is an old feather-bed in the house, and I put them in that when they need nursing at night. That is a device of my own, and much better than going out at twelve o'clock on a cold dark night. By-the-way, I think your idea of selling half or more of Lumalitas admirable. Great tracts of land in this part of the State are out of date, and more bother than they are worth, anywhere. You can invest the money to great advantage in San Francisco; but I think you should devote the rest of the ranch to chickens—"

"No, madam!" Gwynne turned upon her the glittering eye of an animal at bay. Then he laughed. "I have heard that proposition from every man I have met and daily from my superintendent until I managed to suppress him. I won't have a chicken on the ranch. The sight of them not only fills me with ennui, but I have no intention of presenting your comic papers with material. I could write their jokes myself—'*Gwynne before and after*': Westminster in the background and a hayseed figure in front addressing a constituency of chickens. Stumping the country with eggs in my pockets for the children. Dining the eminent members of my constituency on horse-meat, under the delusion that what is good for chickens is good for votes. 'Leghorn Gwynne.' 'The Member from Chickenville.' No thanks. No weapons that I can withhold."



IX

"THIS is all on my ranch," said Isabel; "so there is no danger of being peppered. The rest of the marsh is owned by clubs, and as there was no shooting here last year the ducks should be thicker than anywhere else. We should get our fifty apiece in no time."

They were entering a narrow slough, hardly wider than the boat. It cut its zigzag way through the marsh for many miles, and they could follow its course with the eye but a few feet at a time. Gwynne shipped the oars and began to scull, his gun across his knee. Isabel, in front and with her back to him, sat with her own gun ready for a shot. On one side of them was a large piece of marsh-land, on the left, smaller patches, and little islands caught in the long grasping fingers of the tide. Gwynne had attired himself with an ill grace in a pair of his cousin Hiram's rubber boots that completely covered his body below the waist, and an old shooting-coat with capacious pockets. Isabel wore a similar costume, and but for her hair might have been mistaken for a lad. She possessed no interest for Gwynne whatever at the moment. Nor did anything else but the prospect of a new and exciting sport. The October evening was mellow and full of color, the entire reach of the marsh steeped in a golden haze shed from the glory in the west. Even the forests and the lower ridges rising to Tamalpais had something

aqueous in their vague outlines, swayed gently in the golden tide. Only the tide lands were green; the very water was yellow. Here and there, but far away, a mast or sail rose above the level surface of the marsh. From the distance came the sound of constant shooting.

Gwynne sculled silently, but with some impatience. They had left the open creek far behind and had not seen a duck. Suddenly Isabel's gun leaped to her shoulder. They rounded a sharp point and the whole surface of the narrow slough between them and the next bend was black with sleeping ducks. Gwynne's knee moved automatically to the seat in front of him, and as the startled birds rose he and Isabel fired to right and left. The scattering shot played havoc, and the second charge brought down at least half as many on the higher wing. Isabel reloaded the guns while Gwynne went for the ducks that had fallen on the land. He fell into several holes himself, and returned covered with mud, but waving his birds in triumph; and once more they stole softly along their winding way. The shot had roused neighboring flocks; several dark clouds had risen simultaneously, but in a few moments they settled again.

"You had better use both guns," whispered Isabel, "and I will do the reloading. We can't do much with these old-fashioned things at best."

Gwynne accepted this act of sacrifice with a matter-of-fact nod, and it was but a moment later that they came upon another flock. He fired with an accuracy of aim that won him an admiring mutter, although to miss would have been almost as noteworthy. But after repeating this experience several times, he shrugged his shoulders and announced himself blasé.

"I'd like something a little more difficult," he said. "Ten minutes of this and we can glut the market."

"All men are children," said Isabel, indulgently. "Tie up the boat and we'll go after widgeon."

They landed and stole softly over the larger reach of marsh-land, Isabel in the lead as she knew every hole. It was ten minutes before she raised her hand and pointed to a wilted but still effective screen. Under cover of this they crawled towards a large pond on which ducks were resting but by no means asleep. Before the guns were shouldered they had taken flight; so few were brought down on the wing that Gwynne's interest revived, and he followed Isabel eagerly towards another pond with a better blind. Here they were more wary and more fortunate, and Isabel took a curious pleasure in watching the manifest bliss of her companion. She had never seen him look really happy before. Upon his return to Capheaton from his triumphant battle on the hustings he had been as impassive as his traditions demanded. On the morning of his engagement he had looked rather silly to her detached eye; and immediately after, tragedy and trouble and infinite vexation had claimed him. But this evening, with his cap pushed back, his nostrils distended, his eyes sparkling, he looked like any other young fellow to whom the present was all. Isabel reflected somewhat cynically that it was the opportunity to kill something that had effected this momentary reconciliation with life. But she was too good a sportswoman not to understand his mood, and when he had waded into the lake and returned flushed and triumphant with his bag, she complimented him so warmly that he laughed aloud in sheer delight.

"We have enough for once," she began, but he would not hear of returning to the boat even for the refreshment of tea, and they went on and on until their feet were as weary as their shoulders under the burden that was Isabel's part to string while her partner enjoyed himself.

"But we must really go," she announced, finally. "We have a long stretch out in the open creek after we leave the slough, and it is not so easy to keep the channel after dark. I have lost track of things and don't remember what time the moon rises. You can come every day if you like; and four in the morning is the best time if you are energetic enough—"

"I would get up at midnight—stay up all night. But I am quite willing to return now—and not for tea. I should like several of these ducks for supper, if your Jap is less haughty than mine."

Their way lay through the middle of the marsh-land. It was not until they reached the slough that she uttered a loud sharp cry. The boat was at least three feet below them and there was nothing at either end but mud.

Isabel stamped both feet in succession and flung her burden to the ground. "Why, *why* did I take Mac's word?" she exclaimed, furiously. "He always makes mistakes about the tide—he hasn't an inch of memory left. Why didn't I look at the calendar? Or think? This comes of going off for three weeks instead of staying at home and attending to business. I had a confused idea that this was the 'good week.' Great heavens!"

Gwynne had watched her with considerable interest and curiosity. But he answered, soothingly: "Well, what of it? The tide turns, doesn't it." It happened that he had had no experience of marsh-lands.

"Yes—in six hours."

"Six hours! Well, what of it? It is all in the day's work. Look at it as a jolly adventure." It was his first opportunity to console and he hastened to take advantage of it. "We have tea and sandwiches, warm enough clothing, and the weather is perfection. If we get stiff and chilly we can walk—"

"Walk? In these rubber boots? I am nearly dead already." She had a wild impulse to drop her head on his shoulder and weep; but her pride flew to the front and she shrugged her shoulders and remarked, airily: "I don't really mind anything much except being an idiot. However, I'll make it up to you. I can cook ducks better than Chuma. You make the tea."

Gwynne made a fire out of decayed tule weed and driftwood, then climbed down into the boat and brought up the provisions and utensils intended for an earlier interlude. The tea warmed and stimulated both, and they knelt by the fire and toasted the ducks at the end of the boat-hook, scowling with a preternatural earnestness both were too hungry to observe. Then they fell to, and it is doubtful if either had ever eaten with a keener relish. They were obliged to use their fingers, and, as they had no salt, to shred the ham and wrap it about the morsels of duck, but to such minor matters they gave not a thought, and consumed four teals and every scrap they had brought from home, as well as another pot of tea. Isabel, recalling the injured air of her father, uncle, and brother-in-law when their comfort was rudely disturbed, warmed to Gwynne, who was good-humored and amused. Even the reflection that he had roughed it in far worse straits than this, or that had he the legal right to grumble he might

possibly use it, did not alter the pleasant impression he made as he tramped out the fire, washed his hands in the marsh grass, and then stretched himself full length with his pipe. She lit a cigarette, but had not smoked half its length when she sprang to her feet.

"Look!" she said. "We must get into the boat. It is getting damper every moment, and the fog will make us feel as if we were in our graves if we don't sit on something dry."

She had pointed northward, and Gwynne saw a phantom mountain moving along the level surface of the marsh with the quiet plodding motion of a ship under full sail in a light breeze. The curious combination of images fascinated him, and he watched the stealthy silent progress of this night visitor from the tule lands of the north, that looked as if it might have obliterated the world. As he jumped down into the boat he saw before him, on three sides of him, the sparkling night. Then as Isabel laid her hands on his shoulders and he lifted her down, the fog swept over them, and there was nothing to do but sit and watch the glow of pipe and cigarette; even their own outlines were barely visible.

"I fancy it will go home when the moon rises," said Isabel, with a little shiver. "Are you cold?" she asked, solicitously.

"No," replied a tart voice. "Why didn't you let me ask that? You are not my mother. We can make tea at intervals. How long do you suppose the tide has been out?"

"About two hours."

"I am quite comfortable and have never resented any adventure. And this is the appropriate time and place

for a certain story. As I remarked before I shall not know you until I have heard it. Pasts are dead walls."

"It is not necessary that you should know me."

"I think otherwise. You are my one friend among eighty millions of aliens, or ought to be. I shall continue to feel a superior sort of acquaintance until you have taken me into your confidence."

There was a movement of the fog that he inferred was a shrug. "Very well," she replied, without a break in her cool even voice. "I suppose I shall enjoy talking about myself. It is not often I have had the opportunity to indulge in a monologue in my family, and you certainly are at my mercy. If you attempt to flee you will be mired like the boat, and I could not pull you out."

He had never felt the least curiosity about the past history or the inner life of a mortal before, and in normal circumstances Isabel's would not have appealed to him. But her instrumentality in changing the whole current of his life had alarmed his masculinity into a resolve to demonstrate his superiority if it came to a contest of wills; given birth to a subtle assumption of proprietorship, indifferent in material things, but pressing towards the guarded chambers of the spirit. Isabel, vaguely uneasy earlier in the day, began to appreciate the advance of an outer and powerful force upon her precious freedom, and resented it. And while she made up her mind that if it came to a silent contest of wills, hers at least should not be conquered, she reflected that the deeper intimacy, certain to ensue if she gave him her confidence, would insure her a firmer and subtler hold upon his destinies.

X

"OF course I lived two lives before my father's death. My days were sufficiently filled with him, to say nothing of making both ends meet; for even after my uncle's death, I had only a small income until the day of my complete liberty came. I slept soundly enough when I was not following my father about the house with a candle, or about the hills with a lantern. But such a life preyed upon my spirits. I imagined myself both melancholy and bitter and grew unhealthily romantic. But from the conditions of my life I had two escapes—in books and in dreams. My father hated company more and more and I rarely left him for a dance or one of those church festivities where all the young people of my set were sure to meet. I knew that I was regarded as rather a tragic figure, and this enhanced my morbid egoism. I wonder if I shall ever be as really happy again!

"During the year following my father's death I lived out here alone, but with my hands tied by the executors of my uncle's will. I felt myself quite the enchanted princess and put in most of my time dreaming about the prince. I suppose no girl ever had such wild and impossible notions of love. That is to say most girls have, but I had peculiar opportunities for indulgence and elaboration. At the same time I despised or disliked every man I knew or ever had known—with the possible exception of Judge

Leslie. Not only had I found all the men of my little personal world weak, or selfish, or tyrannical, but those I knew almost as well were narrow, or commonplace, or uninterested in anything but local politics or making money, or both combined. Not but that Rosewater is the world in little. You never read of any old Italian duchy where there was more jealousy and intrigue; more silent and tense, or open and gnashing struggle for supremacy than is centered in these three banks. They have prevented the town from increasing in size and importance, in spite of its prosperity, through their machinations against one another. If a stranger comes to the town intending to invest his money in some one of the flourishing industries, or to introduce another, the banker to whom he brings a letter, or whom he happens to meet first, terrifies him with tales of the rapacity and dishonorable methods of his rivals; and the other two, who fear that the first will get the stranger's business, warn him that Mr. Colton, for instance, never gave an hour's mercy. The three have made slow, sure, dogged fortunes, but each has prevented the others from becoming millionaires, and Rosewater from taking its proper place as county seat. And they are all afraid of new-comers, new capital, of authority passing out of their hands. They are careful not to charge exorbitant rates of interest, and every farmer and merchant in the county borrows from them; partly from habit, partly because the banks are uncommonly sound. They foreclose without mercy, but that does not frighten their old patrons, who have the perennial optimism of the country. The only capital they have not succeeded in frightening off is that controlled by the great corporations. One or two have wedged their way in and others will follow in time. Doubt-

less when the younger men get the reins in their hands they will trim with the times, but the older seem to be Biblical if not Christian, and the consequence is that most of the younger have left for a wider field.

"Finally the day came when I could turn my back on California, and I felt sure that I should remain away for ten years at least. I thought that the liberty I had longed for all my life was mine at last. In a conducted tour, I soon discovered, there was little liberty, to say nothing of privacy. Before I had been two days in the train I was made to feel that there was something wrong with a person that showed a disposition to retire into herself. She was either aristocratic, or had something to hide, unless she responded to the confidences natural to people of that class. As there were just eighteen in the party, of course I always had a room partner, and there was not a woman in the entire company that I would have known from choice. However, it was excellent discipline, not unenlightening, and the end came in six weeks. They sailed from Naples and I wandered about by myself. In a way the liberty was intoxicating, but of course the sum of it was lessened by the daily irritations of travel in Europe: the rapacity of the Italians and French, the wretched trains, the hordes of vulgar tourists, mostly of my own nation, the absurd primness, quite foreign to my nature, I was forced to assume when alone with a man who was neither English nor American, the awful fatigues, the ennuis of long rainy days in the second-rate hotels and pensions I had to frequent. Still, I was too young for any unpleasant impression to take root and discourage me, and there was much that was wholly delightful. I spent weeks in a city or even village that took my fancy. But even so

it was not long before I realized that my liberty was as far off as ever, because my soul at least was possessed by the image of the prince, the more tormenting and insistent as his outlines were so remarkably vague. In the intervals when novelty ceased to appeal, when my very eyes refused to look at things, I pictured inexpressibly thrilling and romantic futures. Then I would fall into a panic at the passing of youth, for a woman never feels so old again as between eighteen and twenty-five—her first quarter-century.

"And I did not lack opportunities. I met many people, some of them quite charming. But they left me cold.

"Then I lived the student life in Paris, studying art just enough to give me the raison d'être. It was very gay, very irresponsible, very educating to a provincial miss. The restaurants with their sanded floors, and the cosmopolitan mixture of students, generally eccentric to look at, brandishing temperament until the poor thing must have been worn out before its harness of technique was ready—all was a perpetual source of delight to me, and I used to let my mind dwell on Rosewater for the sake of enjoying myself with the more wonder and gratitude.

"But of course in such a life I had to have a companion, I could not long go to students' restaurants alone. I had taken a tiny flat in the Latin Quarter at the top of a house, and overlooking a convent where the nuns were always walking in the garden. A *femme de ménage* cooked my breakfast and kept my rooms in order; but although I was quite comfortable and never lonely, I had not been established a fortnight before certain experiences at the restaurants and on the street, which you can imagine for yourself, convinced me that I could not live alone. So I

looked hurriedly over the field, and decided that an American girl in my class suggested fewest complications. Moreover, she interested me. She had a pale tense face, rarely spoke to anybody, and worked as if her life depended upon every stroke, although her talent was not conspicuous. It was not easy to approach her, but one day, after I had dined alone in my flat five times in succession, I noticed that she was paler than usual, and that her hands were trembling. Then I felt certain she was in trouble, and it would have been my instinct to help her in any case. I joined her as we left the atelier, and asked her to walk a bit. It was not long before she admitted that her money was practically gone, and that her family would not send her any more; they had never approved of her coming to Paris to study art. They were not at all well off, and as she had a facility in trimming hats they had thought it her duty to contribute more immediately to the support of the family. She had not advanced as rapidly as she had hoped to do, and it would be insupportable humiliation to return.

"Here was my opportunity. I exultingly invited her to share my apartment, told her that my income was quite enough for two, that I was merely studying life, and that her protection would more than compensate me for the little extra outlay. She declined at first, hesitated for a week; but in the end she came. I grew very fond of her, and she interested me more and more. Her real bitterness taught me what a purely youthful symptom mine had been, and she was rather a clever girl, often entertaining. She was about twenty-six, I fancy, and had received a good education at the academy of the Western town in which she had been born. Her grandparents were Italian

emigrants, and she had fine black eyes and a beautiful mouth.

"Well, before many months had passed I knew that she was in desperate straits, and she offered to go away, reiterating that she had only intended to take advantage of the temporary haven while she fed her courage and painted something that might sell. I knew that if she left me she would throw herself into the Seine, and I persuaded her to stay. It is not difficult to persuade a stricken woman to remain under a friendly roof. I was full of sympathy for the poor little thing, but I don't deny that I was immensely interested, and fairly palpitated with the thought that I was actually seeing life at first hand. Who the hero of her romance was I never discovered, except that he was of her own race, and married, a fact he had concealed until ready to leave Paris. She told me enough to make me hate all men so violently that the prince took himself off and left me in peace. But I had trouble enough in my household. As time went on Veronica's alternate attacks of melancholy and hysteria were terrible. I sat up night after night to keep her from throwing herself out of the window; at times she seemed to be quite off her head. And then she still loved the wretch, and would maunder by the hour. But it ended, as everything does; and the poor girl died. I have no desire to linger over the climax. If anything was needed to set the final seal upon my disgust with life at first hand it was the mean and sordid details that attend death and burial in Paris. The landlord behaved like the mercenary fiends they all are; I was obliged to call in the assistance of the American consul before I could get the body out of the house, and between all the trouble and fuss poor Veronica's story was published from the house-tops.

"As soon as it was over I left Paris and started to travel slowly through Germany, feeling now a real sense of liberty, inasmuch as I was sure I could be all intellect henceforth, dependent upon nothing so unsatisfactory as human happiness. I never wanted another real contact with life. I would travel, and study, and develop my mind, possibly some latent talent. Many talents are manufactured anyhow, and the world is always hailing them as genius.

"But, of course, in time, and with constant change of scene, to say nothing of youth, the impression faded; the painful experience hovered faintly in the background of the past; the romantic imp in my brain, a little pale and emaciated from its long sojourn in the cellar, resumed the throne. Once more I began to realize that I was human, and to cast about for the mate that must surely be roaming in search of me. It was then that I arrived in Munich.

"I saw him first in the Englischergarten. You remember it, that wonderful imitation of a great stretch of open country, with fields where they make hay, and bits of wild woods, and crooked pathways, and bridges over a branch of the Isar, greenest and loveliest of rivers. And then the little beer-gardens, where the people are always sitting and listening to the band—and beyond the tree-tops, the spires and domes of the beautiful city.

"I was standing by the lake watching the swans when he rode by, and I am bound to say that he made no great impression. I hardly should have noticed him had it not been for his excessively English appearance, and a certain piercing quality in the glance with which he favored me. I should never have given him another thought, but a week later I met him formally. It came about oddly enough.



"That evening in looking through my trunk for a business paper I came upon a letter of introduction given me by a friend I had made in Italy. It was to a Baroness L., of Munich. I had quite forgotten it, and the sight of it inspired me with no desire for the social curiosities. I was infatuated with Munich, and its exteriors satisfied me. It has a large courteous grandly-hospitable air, as if it were the private property of a king, to which, however, all strangers are royally welcome. It is the ideal king's city: life but no bustle; neither business, as we understand the word, nor poverty; a city of infinite leisure and infinite interest, a superb living picture-book, where one is ever amused, interested, both stimulated and soothed. I had been in it three weeks and had almost made up my mind to live there, and dream away the rest of my life. Knote and Moréna, Feinhals and Bender were singing at the Hof Theatre. Mottl was conducting. Lili Marberg's Salome was something to be seen again and again. You forgot the play itself. And Bardou-Müller's Mrs. Alving! I did not sleep for two nights.

"Well, I left the letter on my table, instead of returning it to the portfolio of my trunk, and it exercised a certain insistence. What are letters of introduction for? And should I not see the social life of Europe when the opportunity offered? So I left a card on the baroness. She returned it in the course of a day or two, then wrote, asking me to drink tea with her. I went. There were perhaps fifty people there. I have not the faintest idea who they were or what they looked like. Prestage—that was only one of his names, but it will do—asked immediately to be introduced to me, and we talked in a corner for an hour. Before we had talked for ten minutes I knew that the great

gates were swinging open. It is not possible for a woman to define one man's fascination to another, and I hardly know myself why this man so completely turned my head. He was not exactly good-looking, but he had remarkable eyes and a singular tensity of manner, which made me almost breathless at times. He was, moreover, brilliantly educated and accomplished, and the most finished specimen of the man of the world I had met. He was an American of inherited fortune who had spent the greater part of his life in Europe, alternating between Paris and London, although he knew the society of other cities well enough. His contempt for the vulgarity of the huge modern fortunes, and his admiration for Munich, were the first subjects to discover to us the similarity of our tastes.

"We soon discovered others. I think he fell as deeply in love with me as he was capable of doing. He was forty-one and had fairly exhausted his capacity, for he had lived the life of pleasure only; but no doubt I was something new in his experience, and penetrated the ashes like a strong western breeze. I have seen him turn quite white when I suddenly appeared at one of our trysts.

"Of course I lived in a pension. I had no private sitting-room, and he positively refused to sit in the salon a second time. So we used to take interminable walks about Munich, lingering in all the quaint old Gothic corners, along the magnificent stretches of Renaissance; lunching on the terraces of the restaurants under the shade of the green trees, or in quaint little back gardens set in the angle of buildings as mediæval as Rothenburg; the people looking down at us from the narrow windows or the little balconies. We spent hours in the Englischergarten, sitting on the banks of the Isar; often took the train to the beautiful

Isarthal and spent the day in the woods; or sailed on one of the lakes with the tumbled glittering peaks of the Alps always in sight. We visited Ludwig's castles together, attended peasants' festivals in the mountains, lunching in some dilapidated old garden of a Gasthaus. And of course we went constantly to the opera. It was positive heaven for a time, and as romantic as the heart of any romantic idiot could wish. I was so happy I could not even think, even when I was alone. I simply sat like one in a trance and gazed into space, vague rose-colored dreams turning the slow wheel of my brain. No one paid any attention to us. Everybody in the pension was studying something; we avoided the American church and consulate and even the Baroness L. We were determined to have our blissful dream unvulgarized by gossip.

"There is no doubt that for a time my young enthusiasm gave him back a flicker of the romance of his own youth, but of course it couldn't last. I hardly know when it was I began to realize that the whole base of his nature was honeycombed with ennui, and that any structure reared upon it might topple at a moment's notice. I had been steeped to the eyes in the present. I had no wish to marry. Marriage was prosaic. Life was a fairy tale, why materialize it? I soon discovered that man's capacity for living on air is limited, and I had almost yielded to his entreaties to cross to England where we could marry without tiresome formalities, when one day—this was perhaps a month after we had met—he was late at a tryst. I lived a lifetime in five minutes. When he arrived he was so apologetic and so charming that if I had been an older woman I should have known that something was wrong. The next day, as it happened, I had to go to bed with influenza, and

wrote him that I might not get out for a week. He wrote twice a day and sent me flowers. On the fourth morning I felt so much better that I sent him a note by a *dinstmann* telling him that I should lunch on the terrace of the Neue Bürse restaurant. He was not awaiting me; nor did he come at all. Later I saw him driving with an astonishingly handsome woman; who looked as if she had been born without crudities or illusions.

"There are no words to express the tortures of jealousy and disgust that I endured that afternoon. But at five came a note stating that he had been out of town on a lonely voyage of discovery, and begging me to come for a cup of chocolate at the Café Luitpold—where we had gone so often to watch the motley crowd. I went, wrath and horror struggling in my heart with the sanguineness of woman. He had never been so charming and so plausible. I let him go on, exulting in the discovery that he was a liar, for I knew that it pushed me a step towards recovery. When he had finished I told him that I had seen him in the Hofgarten. I never shall forget how white he turned. But if he had been an adventurer his mind could not have been more nimble. He recovered himself instantly, admitted the impeachment, insisted that he had just returned when I saw him, had accepted a seat in the lady's carriage as he was entering his hotel—before he had time to go to his room and find my note. I knew that he was lying, but when he changed the subject to impassioned pleading that I would cross to England at once, I was forced to believe that he loved me.

"But I was miserably undecided. Moreover, I could not leave Munich. My quarterly remittance was unaccountably delayed. I told him this. He knew that I would not

move without my own money, but he sent off several cables. The reply came that the drafts had gone and must have been lost in the mails. Duplicates would be sent. There was nothing to do but wait.

"I suppose that money enters into all things. It certainly ruled my destiny. The fortnight that ensued I never think of if I can help it. He was desperately bored with Munich, but too polite to leave me alone. I saw him with the woman three or four times. She was an Austrian who did not visit the Baroness L., and she was staying at his hotel. There was no doubt that he still wished to marry me, but I was in even less doubt that his ruined nature would yield more and more to this sort of fascination when my novelty had worn thin. Before my money arrived my mind was made up. I dared not trust myself to the seduction of his manner and voice—he was a past-master in the art of making love. I wrote him that I would not marry a man I could not trust, and fled to Vienna, telling my Munich bankers to keep my letters until I sent for them. For two weeks I travelled madly through Austria and Hungary. Never for a moment was I free of torments. Never before had I actually comprehended what love meant. I hardly ate or slept. I arrived at a place only to leave it. The hotel-keepers thought I was the American tourist overtaken by that final madness they had always anticipated. When the fortnight finished I looked back upon an eternity in purgatory. I surrendered; at least he loved me in his way. He had never ceased to urge our marriage. Who could say that I might not be fascinating enough to hold him? It was worth the trial, and I despised myself for laying down my arms without a struggle.

"I took the Oriental express from Budapest, but during

the journey, swift as it was, I underwent certain reactions. I knew that he must have left Munich, that all I could do was to take a letter to his bank and ask that it be forwarded. I wrote the letter as soon as I arrived, but decided to post it; my pride revolted at facing the sharp eye of the person that handled the letters of credit. I had gone to the bank with Prestage more than once.

"As soon as the letter was posted I experienced a certain measure of peace, having done all I could. Nevertheless, to sit still was impossible, and I set out for a walk. It was one of those brilliant clear crisp days with which that high plateau can put even California to the blush. I saw that all the tram-cars were crowded, and that carriage loads of people had flower pieces. I asked if it were a Feiertag and was reminded that it was the 1st of November, All Saints' Day; Munich was on its way to the several cemeteries to decorate the graves. I had seen All Saints' Day in Venice and felt a mild curiosity to compare the Bavarian festival with the Italian. So I walked out to the great Alt Sud Friedhof where so many celebrities are buried, and where I fancied the scene would be most complete. When I arrived at the entrance the frames that had been set up in the outer court were almost denuded of the flower pieces the countrywomen had brought in to sell, but I bought a wreath at the solicitation of a peasant in a picturesque head-dress, and followed the crowd. The cemetery is on three sides of the entrance and enclosed by a high brick wall. I stood a moment at the inner official entrance, hardly knowing which way to turn; but seeing a number of staring people in a corridor on my right that faced one great division of the cemetery, I was turning into it mechanically when a policeman waved me back with the

information that the entrance was at the other end. But not until I had seen, stared, and gasped. In an alcove was a figure, almost upright, that, in the first dazed seconds I took to be a wax-work, but immediately knew to be a dead woman. As I almost ran out I recalled that in Bavaria the dead are taken from the house within six hours, and are kept in a public mortuary for three days, or until all danger of premature interment is over.

"I do not think I should mind, particularly, seeing a ghost; I am sure my mental curiosity would get the better of my unwilling flesh; but I have a real horror of the corpse. I tried to forget the grotesque exhibition I had stumbled upon, in the novel and interesting scene about me. The long aisles of the cemetery were filled with well-dressed people, some strolling, others decorating, all apparently enjoying themselves. Almost all of the graves and monuments were bedecked, and presented a most Elysian appearance with the masses of bright flowers, the streamers of wide ribbon, the lighted lanterns, many of them antique and beautiful, above all the tall flambeaux, whose flames looked white and unearthly against the bright atmosphere. Above was a deep-blue sky with those thick low masses of snow-white clouds one sees only in Bavaria.

"But that grotesque little figure with its shrunken yellow face under the pitiless sun glare, its bony old hands, attached I knew, to the string of a distant bell, did not leave my mind for an instant. I walked down every path, I examined every interesting monument, I even went into the other divisions where there are so many statues in the alcove tombs; but all in vain. I felt that I should see that old woman to the end of my days. I could recall the very pattern of the cheap black lace of her cap. There was but

one way to rid my mind of the obsession, and that was to return to the corridor, stand in front of every earthen figure, remain there until my mind was satiated, in consequence delivered.

"I set my teeth and went back to the Leichenhalle. Of course there were many to keep me company. I looked long and unflinchingly at two gentlemen in evening clothes, an old maid dressed for once on earth as a bride, a young woman and her infant. The coffins lay on an inclined plane and the edges were so concealed by a mass of flowers and greenery that the ghastly company looked as if half rising to hold a reception.

"And then I stood for I do not know how long before the alcove next to the old woman beside the exit, not knowing whether I were turned to stone or sitting by the Rosewater marsh indulging in some wild morbid flight of imagination.

"For there he was. For a second I did not fully recognize him, he was so yellow, his lower jaw had so hideously retreated, completely altering the slightly cynical expression of the mouth. The bright gay sunlight searched out every line carved by too much living, the little wrinkles about the eyes, the weakness of the handsome polished hands. He looked unspeakably aged and hideous. I had never dreamed that a brilliant mind could leave so miserable a shell behind it, that the body was such a mean poverty-stricken thing, a thing to be thrust out of sight as soon as it had fulfilled its work of balking and ruining the soul. I had never looked at Veronica after her death, and only once at my father, who had not horrified me, for here the undertaker has arts unknown, apparently, in Bavaria.

"My love died without a gasp. I shrank and curdled

with horror that I had loved that hideous clay. What he had aroused in me was merely the response of youth to the masculine magnet, a trifle more specialized than I had heretofore encountered; the inevitable fever when infection appears. All personal feeling vanished out of me so completely that even while I stood there I felt the same pity for him that I had for the others, the helpless dead so mercilessly exposed to the vulgar indifferent crowd. If I could have hurried him into the privacy of the grave I would have exerted every effort, but before the laws of the country I was powerless. As I was leaving the cemetery I discovered that I still carried the wreath. I went back and added it to the bank of greenery which his valet no doubt had provided.

"When I returned to my pension I sent for the man and learned that he and the Consul-General of the United States had done all that the authorities had left in their hands. The body was to be shipped to New York within the month. He had died of Bright's disease. It had declared itself a day or two after I left. After ten days of intermittent suffering, during which the valet had felt no apprehension, he had died suddenly.

"I left Munich the same day. If I have failed to give you any adequate impression of my agonies, it will be next to impossible to describe my subsequent states of mind. Indeed I have little remembrance of my mental condition during the weeks of travel in Switzerland and Italy that followed. I was deliberately living up on the surface of my nature, indifferent to what was awaiting recognition below, although I knew it to be nothing unwelcome. Then, finally, I felt the time had come when I could draw aside the black curtain which I had hung for decency's

sake between my consciousness and my depths, and tell the new guest to come forth. The guest was the liberty I had waited for all my life. I felt indescribably free, light, strong. The tyranny of love, even while it was but the love idea, that had shackled me for so many years, narrowing my interests, warping my imagination, clouding the future, was dissipated at last. I had paid the tribute to my youth and sex. I felt really alive for the first time, existing in the actual not in the dream world. There are women and women; and quite enough of the fine old domestic order to keep the world going; but there is a vast and increasing number that are never really alive and worth anything to themselves or life until they have worked through that necessary madness, buried it, and settled down to those infinite interests upon which matrimony, happy or otherwise, bolts a thousand doors. Some day I will tell you my theory of what such women are really born for, but you have had enough for one night and the story is finished."



XI

GWYNNE, between the fog and the story, felt congealed to the marrow. He leaned his elbows on his knees and stared at the bottom of the boat. It was the second time that the dark and carefully guarded recesses of the human soul had been opened to him, but Zeal's at least were a man's, and he had listened to him with a certain passive acceptance cut with lightning-like visions of his own ruined future. He had never been invited into a woman's crypts before, and he hardly knew whether he were gratified or repelled. She had been as brutally truthful as he would have expected her to be if she spoke at all, but he doubted if he understood her as well as he had expected. He had been assured that she had once at least possessed the capacity for intense feeling, but what was the result? And were the depths frozen solid? Or merely buried alive?

He remarked after a moment: "I cannot think of anything appropriate to say, so perhaps it is as well to say nothing. I certainly do not feel that you are in any need of my sympathies, for you are quite terribly strong. When did all this happen?"

"About eight months before I went to England."

"What did you do with yourself in the interval?"

"I climbed in the Alps a bit, then went to Rome and studied the Campagna, then travelled somewhat in

Spain. By that time the desire for California had grown insistent. The novelty of Europe had worn thin. I was tired of playing at doing things, and only at home could I really accomplish anything. I suddenly made up my mind to pay the long-delayed visit to England, stopping in Paris by the way for frocks. I doubt if I ever enjoyed anything more than those three weeks in Paris, where I completely forgot every unpleasant association. It was my first fine wardrobe, my first opportunity to experience to the full the delight of clothes. I have felt quite happy here. California is so far from every other place that it is almost like living on a detached planet. You forget the rest of the world for months at a time. For days after I returned I wandered about out-of-doors in a gay irresponsible mood, and carolled all over the house. Of course it was nothing but the electricity of the climate and that I was in my own State once more and took an insane pride in it. You do not even need to be born here for that; it comes with the inevitable sense of isolation. You will feel it in time. If I had not known that so certainly I should never have dared to urge you to come."

Gwynne smiled with a pardonable cynicism; but while he was not unwilling the conversation should turn upon himself, his curiosity was not satisfied. The fog had gone and the moon had risen. He could see Isabel quite plainly. She had turned her head and was gazing out over the great expanse desolated by the moonlight, and he studied her profile for the first time, often as he had observed it. To-night with the moonlight on it and against the dark hills it was almost repellently unmodern in its sharply cut regularity, the classic modelling of the eye-socket and chin, the nose with its slight arch. Her hair

had fallen from its pins and hung in a braid, its length concealed by her position, and making the effect of a queue. She had long since taken off her hat and wrapped its veil about her head. The veil had slipped and might easily have been mistaken for a ribbon confining the queue at the base of the head. For an instant Gwynne's senses swam. He recalled the portraits of their Revolutionary ancestors in the house on Russian Hill. It might have been a medallion suspended before him. He drew in his breath; then his eye fell to the short thin sensitive upper lip, rarely quiet for all her extraordinary repose; to the full enticing under lip, and the little black moles. Then his gaze wandered down to the rough shooting-jacket, to the rubber boots reaching to her waist, and he only restrained himself from laughing aloud because he feared to rush down the curtain before that secretive nature.

"Then you have no faith in love as the best thing in the world?" he asked.

She turned upon him her clear dreaming eyes. "I have faith enough in love, as I have faith in death, or any other of the uncontrovertible facts, as well as in its mission. But not as the best thing in life; not for my sort at least. Not for even the domestic, for that matter, unless they are utterly brainless. I believe that from the beginning of time the misery of the world has been caused by the superstition that love was all. It must continue to be the fate of the child-bearing woman, I suppose—for a while at least; but others have blundered upon the fact that it is a mere incident, and are far happier in consequence. To women like Anabel freedom means an indulgent husband and plenty of money. To others it means something of which the Anabels know the bare nomenclature: an

absolute freedom of the soul, of which the outer independence is but the symbol. As I said, we only find it when we have finished with the bogie of love. It is a modern enough discovery. Think of the poor old maids of the generations behind us, who, failing to marry, collapsed into insignificance instead of revelling in their deliverance. And what humiliation to know that in your youth you are really wooed for the sake of the race alone, no matter what the delusions. If any one doubts it let him compare the matrimonial opportunities of the ugly maternal girl and the ugly clever girl. When clever women realize that they are a sex apart and wait until their first youth at least is over before selecting a companion of the sex that I am quite willing to concede must always interest us more than our own, and no doubt is necessary to our completion, then will the world have taken its first step towards real happiness."

Gwynne repressed his gorge and answered practically: "Not a bad idea if two were really suited, for no doubt companionship is *one* of the best things in life, and a woman is more useful in many ways to a man than a partner of his own sex. It is even apparent that she does equally well in certain varieties of sport. I suppose the more experience a man has had of life the more he hesitates to define what love really is. One has attacks of such a severity and one recovers so completely! Doubtless Schopenhauer was right: it is merely the furious determination of the race to persist. Spencer tells us that it is 'absolutely antecedent to all relative experience whatever.' Companionship—yes—perhaps—"

"It is necessary to a man; but by no means to all women—"

"Not for yourself, you mean. You are still blunted and somewhat disgusted—"

"I have dismissed the question. You cannot imagine how happy I feel every morning when I wake up, and every night when I go, always rather tired, into my comfortable little bed, knowing that I shall sleep like an infant. I love work. I love out-door life. I love the long evenings with my books and my thoughts, and my plans for the future—all my own. I revel in the thought that I can never be unhappy again, because now I love no one. I loved my poor father, and suffered with him in his fits of repentance and shame. I loved, of course, that man. I have absolutely nothing in common with Paula, and my mother is merely a pretty memory. I am fond of Anabel and perhaps several other friends — Mr. and Mrs. Leslie; but that sort of affection does not go very deep. Love is synonymous with selfishness and slavery—slavery because you no longer own yourself. My brother-in-law adores my sister, makes a great point of his fidelity, because before his marriage he was always flaunting some painted female, without which possession, a few years ago, a San Franciscan felt that he would lose the respect of his fellow-citizens. But Lyster's reform makes him as exacting as a Turk. If my poor silly little sister smiles at some fugitive thought he demands to know what it is, and if she cannot remember he sulks for a day. He would possess her very thoughts. She dares not have a man friend, talk to a man for half an hour at a time. He won't let her belong to a club—clubs are all very well for other women, but his wife is not as other women. On the other hand, he has long since let her persuade him that he is the most marvellous of men, and, in consequence,

permits her to make every sort of mean little sacrifice while he spends his money on himself. Her eyes are in a measure open now, but it is too late, and she rebels in the usual futile feminine way. There are millions like them. You will meet Anne Montgomery. She is thirty-five now, quite plain, and makes a living as a sort of itinerant housekeeper and caterer. She was a most lovely girl, with a wild-rose complexion and starlike eyes, and full of life and buoyant hope. Her great talent was for the violin, and she dreamed of conquering the world. Teachers told her that with the proper study she could at least become a professional of the first rank, although she lacked the genius of creation. Her parents and an older sister—one of the plain, domestic, unselfish kind, whose pleasure is in living for others—were horrified at the bare suggestion. Not only because they were old-fashioned—some of the most old-fashioned people on earth are in San Francisco—but because it would mean separation from their idol. They surrounded her like a flaming belt, not even a man could get at her. They worshipped her as if she was a being of another world, devoured her; all the treasures of life were centred in her. That there might be the less temptation, they never took her to Europe; and gradually induced her to lay aside the instrument altogether. She was very sweet and gentle, and she loved them and submitted (I would have throttled them all). But she faded rapidly, lost her lovely coloring and animation, and she had no other beauty. Then her father speculated and failed. While they were undergoing real privations the influenza swooped down upon them and carried off the three older members of the family in a week. Anne Montgomery is the most conspicuous victim

of what are generally supposed to be the higher affections that I know. They were just common-place animals—those three—nothing more."

"Real happiness may lie in forgetting that love is selfish, and in overlooking the bitter in the sweet."

Isabel shrugged her shoulders. "If one can be happy without love why run the risks?"

They felt that they had exhausted the subject for the present and there was a long silence. Gwynne's eyes wandered over the inexpressibly desolate and sinister landscape. The intense brilliancy of the moon seemed to press darkness down upon the earth. It was true that every object was as sharp of outline as if cut against crystal, but they were a hard dark brown: the hills that jutted out into the windings of the marsh, the marsh itself, the more distant mountains. It looked like a landscape upon which the sun had set for ever, smitten with death—or not yet born into the solar system; some terrible formless menacing globe on the edge of the Universe. As he had approached San Francisco on the afternoon of his arrival, standing on the forward deck of the boat in a high wind, he had thought it the most stranded lonely city he had ever seen. He recalled the impression now, and in a flash he appreciated the Californian's attitude to the rest of the world, the effect of such isolation upon the character of a people that had created a great and important city out of the wilderness, and in half a century. In spite of the obstinate aloofness of his ego he felt an involuntary thrill of pride in his connection with such a people; and hoped it might be premonitory. But again the eerie landscape claimed him and he became aware of the weird night sounds that broke out with violent abruptness after intervals of throbbing

quiet: the loud honk-honk of geese, the shriek of loons, the noisy capricious serenade of the frogs. He experienced a feeling of such utter isolation that he almost started when Isabel spoke.

"These waste places in California are almost terrifying by moonlight," said she. "They always look as if they were brooding, crouching, concentrating their energies for a convulsion. No earthquake country can be quite normal in any of its aspects, nor quite beautiful. Here comes the tide. How Mac will grumble at us! But he is sure to have kept the fire going, and you shall have a cup of hot coffee before you start for home."



XII

GWYNNE, on the following day, was making a late toilet, and in anything but a good-humor, for he had grown accustomed to early rising, when he received a note from Isabel.

It ran:

DEAR PARTNER,—Anabel has just told me over the telephone that Tom and Mr. Leslie and two other representative citizens are going out to see you this afternoon. I have the ghost of an idea that a friendly call is not their only object. *Do* be plastic—it is better in the beginning—until you know your ground. Above all, don't be too English. You are vastly improved, but you have lapses.

I send you your share of the ducks. Mariana's roasting will explain our pride in one of the two most native of our products—the next time we go to San Francisco I'll take you to the market and we will sit in a grimy little balcony restaurant and you will be introduced to fried California oysters.

Please consider the marsh your own; and whenever you come, remember that you are to have breakfast or supper with me. Are you quite comfortable? If anything is wrong I will go over and interview Mariana and the Jap. Of course the latter will appropriate your cigarettes and books; he is probably a prince, and far from condescending to steal, he will take them as his right; and his hauteur may match your own at times. Moreover, he may decamp any

morning without giving notice—Lafcadio Hearn dwells upon the *impermanency* of the Japanese, and we can all bear him out. But on the other hand the Jap will keep your house cleaner than any other sort of servant, and he can be both amiable and alert when he chooses. I merely warn you, for I know nothing of your present *homme de chambre* beyond the recommendation of my Chuma, who is amiable to the verge of imbecility. If he disappears, let me know at once, for I really want to make you comfortable and contented in what I know must seem to you little more than a beautiful wilderness peopled by ambitious barbarians. But wait till you know San Francisco!

ISABEL.

Gwynne smiled at the form of address and the expressions of concern in his welfare; but he scowled twice over the admonition to be plastic and American.

"I'll be what I damn please," he announced, aloud, much to the surprise of Imura Kisaburo Hinomoto who entered at the moment with his shaving water.

Nevertheless, when his visitors arrived, late in the afternoon, his natural courtesy, and the reflection that he had not come to America to fail, induced him to receive the four with something like warmth, and to place his cigars and whiskey—he already knew better than to offer them tea—at their immediate disposal. They sat on the porch facing the mountain, and for a few moments the conversation was confined to the weather and the scenery, giving Gwynne an opportunity to observe his guests with some minuteness. Judge Leslie and young Colton he had already met, and he liked the former, a pleasant shrewd tactful man, who was one of the chief ornaments of the northern bar, and universally admitted to be "dead



straight." So "straight," indeed, was he that his term of judgeship had been brief. He had been carried to the bench on an independent ticket, but the reform movement subsiding, he could obtain re-election only by bargaining with political bosses, and this he refused to do; but after the fashion of the country he retained his title. He had a loose hairy benignant face with a humorous but penetrating eye and the usual domelike brow. His body had grown unwieldy from years and lack of exercise, and his clothes were old-fashioned and, generally, dusty. He voted the Republican ticket and was not too well pleased with his son-in-law who was a red Democrat and rising daily in the good graces of the party bosses.

This young man who was sipping his plain soda and commenting on neither the scenery nor the weather, had inspired Gwynne with a certain interest and curiosity. He was thirty but looked little over twenty, and his large limpid blue eyes were as guileless as a child's. He had a long pale face with an indifferent complexion and the common American lantern jaw. His hair and brows and lashes were paler than straw, and his long lank figure was without either distinction or muscularity. Nevertheless, there was a curious suggestion of cynical power in his impassive face and lolling inches, and Gwynne had made up his mind that he would be useful as a study in politics.

Mr. Wheaton, one of the present "City Fathers," a position he had occupied with brief intermittences for many years, had hard china-blue eyes and a straight mouth, in a large square smoothly-shaven face. He had crossed the plains in the Fifties from the inhospitable State of Maine, sought fortune in the gold diggings with moderate success, avoided San Francisco with a farmer's

dread of "sharpers," and drifting to the hamlet at the head of Rosewater Creek had opened a small store for general merchandise. Frugality and a shrewd knowledge of what men wanted and women thought they wanted had increased his capital so rapidly that in five years he had converted a wing of the store into a bank. To-day he was a power. His wife was the leader of Rosewater society and attended first nights in San Francisco.

Mr. Larkin T. Boutts was new to Gwynne, although his status was easily to be inferred from the constant references in the local press. He was a fat little man who sat habitually with a hand on either knee, which he clawed absently both in conversation and thought. Otherwise his attitude was one of extreme repose, even watchfulness. He was excessively neat, almost fashionable in his dress, which—Gwynne was to observe in the course of time—was invariably brown. He had a small pointed beard and a sharp direct dishonest eye. He was the leading hardware merchant of Rosewater and owned the hotel and the opera-house. His business methods had never been above criticism, and his politics drove the San Francisco correspondent, during legislative sittings, into a display of caustic virtue which gave the newspaper he represented just the necessary smack of reform and did not hurt its inspiration in the least. For Mr. Boutts was too sharp for the law, and all his sins were forgiven him on account of his genuine devotion to Rosewater. Far from battening on her, after the fashion of the San Francisco cormorant, he had never taken a dollar out of her that he had not returned a hundred-fold, and he was the author of much of her wealth.

This gentleman was the first to indicate that they had



not driven out to Lumalitas to discuss the weather and the scenery.

"Best come to business," he said, abruptly. "Judge, will you do the talking?"

But Judge Leslie, who was a modest man, waved his hand deprecatingly. "The idea is yours, sir, and yours is the right to state the case."

The host hastily poured whiskey-and-soda lest he should look haughtily expectant.

"It's just this, Mr. Gwynne," began Boutts, in his suave even tones. "We have seen your ads. We know that you contemplate selling off a good part of your ranch— Well, there was a buzz round town when those ads were read, and I was not long passing the word that there would be a mass-meeting that night in Armory Hall. That's where we thresh things out, and in this case there was no time to lose. We had a pretty full meeting. Judge Leslie took the chair, and I opened with some of the most pointed remarks I ever made. I was followed with more unanimity than usually falls to my lot. The upshot was that resolutions were passed before nine o'clock, and a committee of four was appointed to wait upon you to-day—and endeavor to win you to our point of view," he continued, suddenly lame, for by this time Gwynne, forgetting Isabel and his good resolutions, was staring at the common little man with all the arrogance of his nature in arms, and the color rising in his cheeks. Mr. Boutts's hands gripped his knees as if for anchorage, and he proceeded, firmly: "No offence, sir, I assure you. This is a free country. The man who tells another man what he'd orter do should be called down good and hard. Nothing could be further from our intention. The meeting was called only in the

cause of what you might call both self-defence and patriotic local sentiment, although it's a sentiment that's local to about two-thirds of California—only we do more acting and less talking than most. It's now some weeks since we adopted resolutions in a still bigger mass-meeting and got the best part of the county to subscribe to them; on the ground that an ounce of prevention and so forth. So we just hoped that as you have come to live among us you could be brought to see things from our point of view."

He scraped his hair forward and dropped his voice confidentially, at the same time darting a sharp glance through the open window beside him. "It's this Japanese business. The Chinese, back in the Seventies, was not a patch on it, because the Chinee never aspired to be anything but house servants, fruit pickers, vegetable raisers and vendors on a small scale, and the like. The agitation against them which led to the exclusion bill was wholly Irish; that is to say it was entirely a working-class political agitation, because the Chinee was doing better work for less money than the white man. The better class liked the Chinee and have always regretted the loss of them; and to-day those who are left, particularly cooks and workers on those big reclaimed islands of the San Joaquin River, where they raise the best asparagus in the world—yes, in the world, sir—get higher wages than any white man or woman in the State.

"But these Japs are a different proposition. They're slack servants, unless they happen to be a better sort than the majority, and that unreliable you never know where you are with them. And being servants is about the last ambition they've come for to this great and glorious country. They're buyin' farms all up and down the

rivers, the most fertile land in the State, to say nothing of some of the interior valleys. You see, there were big grants like Lumalitas at first over a good part of California. Then the ranches of thousands of acres were cut up and sold into farms of three or four hundred acres that paid like the mischief so long as the old man stuck to business himself. This he generally did; but times have changed, and now all the young men want to go to town; and most of the big farms have been cut up into little ones and sold off to immigrants and the like. Well, that's the Japs' lay. They like things on a small scale and know how to wring a dollar out of every five-cent piece. No one's denying they're smart. They slid in and got a good grip before we thought them worth looking at. Now we're saddled with about thirty thousand of them, and more coming on every steamer from Honolulu and Japan. Some years ago when they began to find themselves as a nation, and to rebel at the foreigners that were ruling things through the open ports, they let it be pretty well known that it was going to be Japan for the Japanese. Well, now the sooner they know that it's California for the Californians the better it will be for all hands. We don't go round lookin' for trouble, but if it comes our way we don't mind it one little bit. We'll tolerate the Japs just in so far as we find them useful, and useful they are as servants; for if they don't hold a candle to the old Chinee, they're a long sight better than our lazy high-toned hired girls, who are good for just exactly nothing; and we need a certain amount of them for hire in other fields; but as citizens, not much. We've put a stop to that right here, in this county at least; and so, Mr. Gwynne, that's the milk in the cocoanut, and we hope that you'll see

things our way, and not sell any of your land to the Japs."

"You see," interposed Judge Leslie, that Gwynne might not feel himself rushed to a decision. "These little men, while possessing so many admirable traits that I am quite willing to take off my hat to them, are not desirable citizens in a white man's country. Not only is their whole view of life and religion, every antecedent and tradition, exactly opposed to the Occidental, so that we never could assimilate them, never even contemplate their taking a part in our legislation nor marrying our daughters, but—and for the majority of the people this is the crux of the whole matter—commercially and industrially they are a menace. With their excessive frugality they can undersell the most thrifty white man, both as farmers and merchants; and the contempt they excite, particularly in this state of extravagant traditions, is as detrimental in its effects as their business methods; the more a man exercises his faculty for contempt the more must his general standards sink toward pessimism, and pessimism is neither more nor less than a confession of failure in the struggle with life. I never was much of a fighter, so I believe in eliminating the foe whenever it is possible. At all events we have made up our minds to eliminate the Jap, what with one motive and another, and I think we will. It may come to war in time—when the United States are ready—but we Californians have a way of taking matters into our own hands, and as war is a remote possibility, and we have little prospects of legislation—what with the treaty and the unpreparedness of the country for war—we just do what we can to freeze the Japs out. If we must have small farmers and our own young men have other ambitions,



there are plenty of good European immigrants, and it is our business to encourage them. We assimilate anything white so quickly it is a wonder an immigrant remembers the native way of pronouncing his own name. But the Oriental we can't assimilate, for all our ostrich-like digestion, and what we can't assimilate we won't have. It is also true that we don't like the Jap. He antagonizes us with his ill-concealed impertinence under a thin veneer of servility; and superior as he is, still he has a colored skin. Now, right or wrong, Christian or merely natural, we despise and dislike colored blood, every decent man of us in this United States of America. Your sentimentalists can come over and wonder and write about us, reproach us and do their honest ingenuous best to convert us, it never will make *one damned bit of difference.* We are as we are and that is the end of it. The antagonism, of course, only leaps to life when the colored man wants equal rights and recognition, something he will never get in the United States of America, as long as the stripes and the stars wave over it; and the sooner the sentimentalists quit holding out false hopes the better. As to the Chinese, it is quite true that there was no objection to them outside of politics. And the reason was, they kept their place. The antipathy to the Japanese extends throughout all classes. Every thinking man in the State is concerned with the question. California will be overrun with them before we know where we are; and we are hoping that other counties will give an ear to the wisdom and farsightedness Mr. Boutts has displayed, in proposing that no more land shall be sold—or rented—to the Japanese. They can work for us if we have need of them, for a while, but they cannot settle."

Gwynne had been thinking rapidly as Judge Leslie

drawled out his homily. In his new apprehension of latent weaknesses in his character he was indisposed to yield to pressure, but he was equally desirous not to let the turmoil into which his inner life had been thrown lead him to any ridiculous extremes; not only interfering with his prospects, but converting himself into chaos. He was extremely anxious to make no mistakes at the outset of his new career, beset with difficulties enough. Their words had every appearance of being a just presentment of a just cause. He didn't care a hang about the "Jap." For the matter of that, he reflected with some bitterness, he didn't care a hang about California. At this point in his reflections he became aware that Colton was turning his head with a sort of slow significance. He looked up and watched a pale eyelash drop over a deep gleam of intelligence. Mr. Leslie finished speaking, and Gwynne replied with an elaborate politeness, which might be his vehicle for spontaneous sympathy or utter indifference,

"Thank you all very much for your confidence in me, and also for preventing me from making what no doubt would have been a serious mistake. I have no desire whatever for the Japanese as a neighbor. I was one of the few to recognize the menace of Japan to Occidental civilization when all the world was sympathizing with it during its war with Russia, and they will get no encouragement from me. So the matter is settled as far as I am concerned."

"Shake!" said Mr. Wheaton, in a deep rumbling voice.

The four shook hands solemnly with their new neighbor, then, with even a greater gusto, drank his health. Gwynne suddenly remembering the California tradition, and the ducks, invited them to remain for supper; but all declined

except Colton, who sent his wife a message by his father-in-law. The other three climbed into Judge Leslie's surrey and departed, Colton remarking, apologetically, and somewhat wistfully:

"She's dining at the judge's and won't miss me: I never leave her alone. I'll get back in time to take her home."

XIII

MARIANA cooked the ducks with the skill of the unsung *chef* she was, and enhanced them with other delicacies for which she alone had a name. Gwynne, faithless to Isabel's crude though honest effort, rose to gayety and wondered whether California was practising the insidious methods of the wife. Colton, absent of eye, disposed of his share of the repast as negatively as he did most things, and as soon as they had retired to the veranda produced a bag of peanuts from his pocket, without which, he remarked, no meal was complete. Gwynne declined the national delicacy, feeling that diplomacy had its limits, and lit a pipe, wondering how he should lead his new friend to give him some practical political information. He detected the guile under that bland, almost vacant exterior, and Colton's prattle about duck-shooting and deer-hunting, although apparently endless, did not divert him for a moment. But he had less trouble than he had anticipated. Colton's mind seldom roved far from politics, and it required little tact to lead him to the trough.

"As I am necessarily in your confidence I will take you voluntarily into mine," he announced, in his clear high pipe. "I don't in my heart care a hang more for the Democratic party than I do for the Republican. But the Republicans own the State at present, and there's no

chance to get your name up and really do things in that party. They're out for graft, every last one of them. The chance is on the other side. It's a big chance; for the laboring class, what with unions, and being rotten spoilt with easy living in this State, is becoming more and more dissatisfied every day. If they were let alone it would never occur to them they weren't the chosen of the Lord; but we—the Democratic party—can't afford to let them alone, unless we want to go out of business altogether. They are just about the only dough we've got to work on, and for the last few years we've been systematically sowing the seeds of discontent by means of the press, metropolitan and local, abusing the rich, the trusts, harping on the segregation of capital by a favored few, to the unjust and illegal impoverishment of the many, painting gaudy pictures of what the working-man's lot will be when he gets his rights, emphasizing that in this State, of all others, man was intended to be happy and share equally in her abundance. We sail pretty close to anarchy; but they are an ignorant foolish lot, and we keep a tight hand on the reins and will drive them in a straight line when the time comes. I am qualifying for the position of district leader hereabouts, although I'm not announcing it from the house-tops. But the present one is getting old, and I'm on the inside track. I dress in these battered old clothes, that make my little wife weep—she'll never have any other cause from me—just to impress the farmers what a good Democrat I am; not a bit like Hyliard Wheaton, who is a dude. All he is waiting for is his father's death so that he can move to San Francisco. But I drive round in a dusty old buggy, with candy for the children in my pocket, and chin with the farmers about the crops and any old thing.

When this county turns Democratic, as it shall in the next five years—likely as not sooner, we have so much raw material to work on in these immigrants—I intend to go to Congress, hold on in the House until there is a vacancy in the Senate, and there I'll be for life, and the boss of this State to boot. I can't say I care about the Presidency. It's only a chance that there may be anything doing while you're in—it's largely luck—and then when you're out, if you survive the White House — which most Presidents don't—you're as good as dead. I don't care about going abroad as a Consul-General, or even Ambassador, for I wouldn't hold any office under the United States government that was dependent upon the favor of a small group in Washington. You're no better than a servant, and you never know where you are. Political enemies at home, liars abroad, somebody with a little more influence, or any low political business, and you're fired without being heard in your own defence. You've got no redress, and may be disgraced for life without ever knowing where you were hit. None of that for me, although I'd like a big position of that sort for my wife. But she can cut all the dash she wants as a senator's wife, and I'll wield the big stick. That's where the fun comes in. I have a natural turn for politics, and then it's the only road out of Rosewater. The old gentleman is dead set upon my succeeding him in the bank, and he'd never give me a lift, although if I made a hit at anything he'd be so proud it would be easy sailing after. He's not a bit displeased that I've turned over a few thousands an aunt left me. But I'm after bigger game than that. She also left me two thousand acres of land, that look hopeless because there's not so much as a spring on them, and they're in one

of the droughtiest sections in the State—she got them as a bad debt. Now, just over the border of that ranch is a big lake, and the owner of it won't sell or rent me water rights, thinking I'll sell out for a song. But he don't know Tom Colton. I'm a member of the present legislature—and that isn't the least of the reasons why. A few hundreds in a few hungry pockets, and we run a snake through the legislature declaring that lake state property. Then I ditch from the lake, and I am the proud owner of a large tract of valuable irrigated land. I sell off in small farms, and clean up a hundred thousand dollars. That I'll invest in a Class A building in San Francisco. I'm also in this projected electric railway of Boutts's—would advise you to buy a block of that stock—I can let you in on the ground floor. Money and political power, boss of this State—that's what I'm after—and no idle dream either. I know the ropes, and all I have to do is to hang on. I'll build a house on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, and my wife shall have dresses four times a year from Paris." He turned to Gwynne with glowing eyes. "You've barely seen her—and you haven't had a sight of the kids. She's Isabel's great friend. I wonder you haven't been round. I've got the nicest little shanty you ever saw, and we'd always be glad to see you."

Gwynne thanked him absently; then, while his guest, dismissing politics, indulged in domestic rhapsodies, relating several anecdotes the while he consumed another bag of peanuts, Gwynne's brain worked rapidly. He boiled with discouragement and disgust. The cynical frankness of this young provincial, with his serene confidence in his star, and in his power to handle the millions he despised, bore a primitive and humiliating likeness to

his younger self: Americanized by the lower standards of his country perhaps, but painfully like in its elements. All he could claim, it seemed to him at the moment, was a higher personal sense of honesty and honor; and how long would he keep it in this country? While he was hesitating between taking a possible rival into his confidence, and an arrogant desire to announce his reason for coming to California, without regard to consequences, Colton dropped the subject of his family, scattered the mass of shells on the floor with a sudden sweep of his foot, and tipping his chair back against the wall, produced a large red apple and his pocket-knife.

"I can't say that I like the seamy side of politics," he remarked, absently, as he performed a delicate operation without breaking the skin. "My wife always maintains that I'm the most honest man alive, and I shouldn't wonder if that was the way I really was made. Anyhow, I know I'd a heap sight rather do a man a good turn than an ill one; but when he gets in your way what are you going to do in a country where politics are machine-made and every cog has to be oiled with graft? I'm thankful I'll never be forced to accept a bribe—there's a lot of difference between giving and taking, and I guess I'll have to do a lot of the first. But it's politics or nothing with me, aside from having a natural genius for them. I'll never get out of Rosewater otherwise. My father is likely to live for twenty years yet, and I hope to God he will; but I want the big game while I'm young. If the country was better I'd be, too, and like my job. But you've got to play the game in your shirt-sleeves. Kid gloves, and you sit on the fence and watch somebody else wallow in after the prizes."

"It seems to me that the best chance for fame and power lies in that superior strength which is allied with honesty. A man who is at the same time a clever manipulator of men, and whose aim is statesmanship, should be able to reach his goal by a clean road."

Gwynne had been long enough in the United States to blush uneasily as he delivered these sentiments, and his color deepened as Colton gave a little snort.

"Can't be done. Not in this State, anyhow. You've been talking to Isabel. She looks like the Pilgrim Fathers and has inherited all their antiquated notions. Honest, now—*are* your politics so much better than ours?"

"A long sight. And they are by no means perfect. We have our machine and our compromises, and all the rest of it; and even a few wholly rotten boroughs. Fifty years ago we were blatantly worse than you are to-day. As long as the game lasts, and there are two parties, there must be more or less chicanery, but we are snow-white compared with the mire of this country. And it is an anomaly I cannot understand. I have now been a year in the United States, have talked with hundreds of Americans, studied them and their institutions. Few have struck me as personally dishonest—as we interpret the word in England. Human nature in this country, indeed, has at times appeared to me almost elemental, utterly without the subtlety that makes for crooked dealing. There is a thousand times more petty trickery in Europe; and, with us, more hypocrisy, certainly; but politics we have at least elevated. Here, the best man in private life seems to become transformed the moment he enters the political atmosphere, and if he is not a scoundrel, he sails pretty close to the wind."

"H—m! All you say may be true. I don't agitate my gray matter over problems. I know what we are, and the work cut out for me if I want to stay on top. I have known reformers. We have lots of spasmodic attempts at reform right here in this district. When the reform is directed at some glaring evil, something that makes us uncomfortable, then it goes through. When it's directed against politics in general, then the reformer falls so hard he never gets up—unless, to be sure, he scrambles up p. d. q. and trims with the wind. And that, I'm bound to say, he generally does. We've had our idealists—talk till your mouth waters. One session in Sacramento generally cures them. When it doesn't, we have no more idea what becomes of them than of an ant that butts in on a procession of other ants. Ever watch ants?"

It was Gwynne's turn to snort.

"I take my boy up on the hills every Sunday afternoon when it is fine, and we watch ants and grasshoppers and birds and all the rest of it. Why don't you get married? There's nothing like it. I may have some hard hoeing ahead of me, but I always have that cosy pretty home at the end of the day, and the sweetest wife in the world—who doesn't know the Republican party from the Democrat, and never opens a newspaper. Isabel is too high and mighty. She's a wonderful girl all right, but the last woman I'd want for a wife. I know a girl that would just suit you—Dolly Boutts. She's as pretty as a peach, and as domestic as Anabel. I'll have you both in to supper, as soon as we get a new cook. We've had four this month, and my wife warned me I was not to ask you to anything until she was perfectly satisfied. She's the best housekeeper you ever saw."

Gwynne maintained an infuriated silence. It was some moments before he could trust himself to articulate. Colton, munching his apple, and twirling the long spiral of skin he had peeled off without a break, detected nothing unusual in the atmosphere. It was characteristic of him that he took no interest in his new friend's future. Isabel had told him that Gwynne had not sufficient income to maintain his rank in England, and had resolved not only to drop his titles, but the name by which he had so long been known; being averse from notoriety. Colton, who had barely recalled the name of Elton Gwynne—he usually skipped the telegrams unless a war with picturesque details monopolized the foreign columns—had been somewhat amused at the precaution, but respected it; he would never have thought of betraying a confidence reposed in the bank. He assumed that Gwynne intended to become a rancher, like so many other Englishmen, and that he purposed reading law merely as a secondary occupation. He could have thought of several more interesting methods of putting in time; but every one to his taste.

Gwynne spoke finally, and when he did, Colton, whose chair was still tipped against the wall, sat forward with a square planting of his feet.

"I came to California with one intention only," said Gwynne: "to have the political career that my elevation to the peerage deprived me of in England. I had intended to work with the Democratic party, but I am free to state that your account of it has turned my stomach. My reasons for selecting it were, partly, that in principle at least it more nearly approached the Liberal party in England; partly because of its weakness in strong men. But if it is as rotten as you say I am afraid it would be a

waste of time to qualify for it; I certainly could not work in harmony with it. However, there is an abundance of time for close observation. I cannot vote for four years, and if I finally decide in favor of the Republican party, at least we shall not be rivals."

"*Jiminy!*" exclaimed young Colton, ingenuously; but Gwynne could see the glitter of his eye. "Well, I'm glad to hear it. Not much you don't go over to the Republicans! There isn't five cents' worth of choice between the two parties when it comes to a square deal on any measure ever put up, and this slow wave of reform that's trying to crawl over the country—against trusts, graft, and the like—is just strong enough to swamp the Republicans and give us our chance. Rivals! Not a bit of it. There's room for all, and you're just the man we want. Isabel told me you were a wonderful speaker—I'd forgotten. That's *just* what we want. I can't speak for a cent. There's no one in the district that can carry a crowd. The boss was wailing over it the other day. You can do a lot in the next four years. You'll go to all the conventions and county meetings with me and make my speeches. I'll introduce you to everybody that can put you *on*. You've fallen into clover with the judge, because his only son, who was practising with him, has had to go to southern California to live—nerves all broken up. He'll push you all right, and as soon as you have swallowed the California codes you can practise in the courts by courtesy. Then I'll take you to Sacramento with me next year—I'm a senator this term—as my private secretary, and you'll learn a lot. Your hair will stand up straight, but never mind. All that will pave the way for whatever office you want to begin with when your papers are ripe. I'll see

that it's a good conspicuous town or county office, and the legislature will follow as a matter of course. That will fill in while you are waiting a chance for Congress—you must be seven years in the country for that—nine for the Senate. Only, you must swallow us whole. You can't make us over. We Democrats are determined to get on top again and have our chance at the pickings. We'll talk reform, of course. That's where your eloquence will come in, and the more you believe in it while you're holding forth about the Republican party robbing the widow and orphan—more particularly the farmer and the laborer—the better. We'll promise the working-man a sort of sugar-coated socialism, but we won't inspire him with any higher ideals than pecuniary profits, *if you please.* That would mean content, and the end of the Democratic party. Well, think it over. I must go. My little old woman doesn't like to sit up late. Mind you drop in and see her the next time you are in town."

Gwynne rang for his guest's buggy, thanked him for his advice; then ordered his horse and rode about the ranch half the night.

XIV

A FORTNIGHT later Isabel announced to Gwynne that she intended to give a party and introduce him to the young people of Rosewater.

"All the girls want to know you, Anabel tells me, and as it is a relief to hear that they are interested in something besides cards, and as nobody else seems disposed to take the initiative, I have concluded to play the *grande dame* for a night. In a way it is my duty to introduce you formally, although it would be more so if they had done anything for me since my return. However—I will ask them for next Saturday evening if you have nothing better to do."

"One day is quite the same as another to me," said Gwynne, dryly. "What do you fancy are my evening engagements? I have not even begun to read law with Mr. Leslie; he has gone off to southern California to see his son. He says he is always restless in the autumn, as young people are in the spring, but has promised me his attention before the middle of this month."

They were rowing down the channel of the wider portion of the creek towards Isabel's landing, their boat filled with spoil. The little steamboat was winding proudly through the marsh, there were a dozen sails in sight; from the south came an incessant sound of firing. The distant mountains looked as hard as metal and there was a new crispness in

the air. Little rain had fallen, but it was no longer summer. Gwynne had exchanged his khaki riding-clothes for corduroy; and Isabel's habit, although still dust-colored, was made of cloth instead of pongee. To-day they wore light covert coats over their canvas and rubber.

With the passing of the heat and the advent of the daily electric breezes sweeping up the valleys from the sea, Gwynne felt a slow lifting of the dead weight on his spirits, although he was only happy when he had his gun in his hand. California seemed less like a voluptuous leviathan blowing poppy-dust that blunted the memory of all things beyond her borders. At first he had been vaguely uneasy at the insidious suggestion that he had transferred himself to another planet, but he was beginning to suspect that California, true to her sex, might have surprises in store that would quicken his blood at least. He still disliked her at night: the high unfriendly arch of her sky, the sinister atmosphere that brooded over her spaces, suggesting illimitable reaches where no man dwelt, or would long be tolerated. But her days seemed full of promise, and they certainly were full of beauty.

He still fought with a longing to confide in Isabel: his apprehensions and doubts, his haunting interrogation of inherent greatness. But he turned from the temptation in a panic of spirit, sure that he would fail unless he fought his battle alone. He had pondered more and more upon his possible debt to his mother; and the doubt that she might have been the foundation of his courage and self-confidence was as bitter as that he might have owed the extraordinary rapidity of his career to the influence of his family and name. And Isabel's very strength alarmed him, the more so as he felt her subtle fingers among the

leaves of his new destiny. So he merely smiled into her eyes and made a gallant remark, a purely masculine method of emphasizing that woman is charming in her proper place.

"I shall be delighted to dance again; particularly—it seems odd—as I have never danced with you. And it is a year since I have seen you in an evening gown. I have a vivid remembrance of how you looked that night at Arcot, when you turned so many heads."

Isabel colored, and whether with pleasure or resentment, she had not the least idea. But she answered, hastily:

"I feel that I have been very selfish to do nothing before. But really, it seemed hopeless until Anabel told me yesterday that there was a vast amount of interest in the young English rancher. I am afraid the girls here will not interest you; only you should have the opportunity of deciding that question for yourself. But what will be really delightful will be to show you San Francisco. I have not been able to leave the ranch for a day since that three weeks' outing I had no business to take. But I have had half a dozen resentful letters from Paula, who has persuaded herself that you are her cousin too, and asserts her right to know you. But neither she nor Lyster has the remotest suspicion of your identity. Elton Gwynne might have a dozen brothers; nor is it likely they ever heard the name. If you were an artist or actor or littérateur or composer you might be as well known in San Francisco as in London. There is no city in the United States one-half so artistic—nor so given to fads. But in European politics, the young people, at least, take as much interest as they do in the canals of the moon. So you are quite safe, and

Lyster is the man of all others to show you Bohemian San Francisco and give you a thoroughly good time. We might go down a few days after the party."

"That will be very jolly. I will confess that although San Francisco did not inspire me with enthusiasm, it has occurred to me that it might be an improvement on Rose-water. . . . Oh, by-the-way, I had a letter from my mother not long ago, in which she said she had met some San Franciscans at Homburg—Hofer, I believe the name was—and had promised I should call on them, mentioning me, of course, as John Gwynne. I have wondered if the risk would be worth while. The amusement to be derived from provincial society is very doubtful."

"Provincial! What arrogance! Do please call on the Hofers. They have the old Polk house, whose history I have told you, and entertain like princes. Besides, Mr. Hofer is one of that small millionaire group that is trying to clean up San Francisco municipally. He is quite worth knowing. And I want you to know San Francisco. It is my ambition to be a great figure in San Francisco—and I have seen other cities, and might be enjoying myself in England this moment."

"Yes, I know," said Gwynne, smiling, and admiring her pink cheeks and flashing eyes. "And of course I don't forget that you have spurned a great position for the sake of your beloved city. That is really at the root of my desire to know the place. If it has a fascination I should like to feel it. Fascination is a strong word and means a considerable amount of enjoyment, up to a certain point. But I am glad to have heard the declaration of your ambition. Is it the final one?"

"It is the pedestal," said Isabel, enigmatically. "Some-

time, when you give me your confidence, I will give you mine."

"I have no confidences to make—none, at least, that can compare with the rich experiences of your past. I told you all about Mrs. Kaye before I left England, and, so far, America has left me—well, unfascinated. By-the-way, Colton informs me that he and his wife have picked out some one to cheer my loneliness and—"

"Who?"

"I do not remember her name. Doubtless she will be at the party. I am curious to see all your friends together. I have seen an astonishing number of pretty girls in the street, and I am wondering how they will stand the test of lighting up; the great test to my mind. I don't know which I like least, the manufactured animation of the European woman of the world, or the too natural animation which makes the American girl's features dance all over her face. You, if you don't mind my saying so, are one of the very few Americans I have met that has something of the Englishwoman's faculty of looking, at the same time, statuesque and glowingly alive."

"You excite my suspicion: I see no indication that you are out of practice. It is quite true that American women's faces, like their voices, lack cultivation. Well, you will see a good many pretty girls on Saturday night, and with no particular advantage of dress. Money has nothing to do with social position in these country towns. Perhaps twenty families besides the bankers and Mr. Boutts, and the Leslies, are well off. But many girls who are in the best society earn their living: typewriters, clerks, book-keepers, and the like. One has carried on her father's drug-store since his death. Most of the young

men that could get away have gone, and there are not half a dozen left with any money behind them. The majority of beaux are either clerks, or in some small business, although there are always the doctors and clergymen—very few young lawyers. Snobbery barely exists. There are lines, but purely theological. All social groups centre about the churches. The first here has always been the Episcopalian."

"It had occurred to me that society of any sort had ceased. Of the famous California hospitality I have seen nothing. A number of men have driven out and called upon me, and I have returned their calls, and found their houses very well appointed—although some member of the family usually answered the bell; and one morning I saw Miss Wheaton sweeping off the porch, her head tied up in a towel. All I meet appear to be very cordial and friendly, but I have not been asked to take so much as a cup of tea in a house in the county, and I have now been here something like five weeks."

"California hospitality is a mere legend except in San Francisco. In the small communities it has never existed in my time, although they used to dance a good deal before cards turned their heads. You will find just as much haggling over a five-cent piece here as in any small New England town. These rich men have made their money by hoarding and wary investments, rarely speculating; and that tells immensely on the character. I doubt if the State itself has ever known the meaning of hospitality since the old ranch days, when, of course, it was prodigal. It is the San Franciscans that have kept the tradition alive; they are as reckless, as extravagant, as royally indifferent to mere money as in the famous Fifties. If you

happen to call too close to a meal-time in one of these towns, the meal will be postponed until you leave. In San Francisco they would give you two-thirds of their last crust. At the old Rosewater dances we never had anything but cake and lemonade—ice-cream in very hot weather. I think it would be a good idea to give them a shock and have a supper from town."

"I believe you are socially ambitious," said Gwynne, smiling. "No doubt it is your intention to make a fortune and lead San Francisco society."

"Perhaps, but not in the way you mean."

XV

THE long-closed bar-room of Old Inn was aired for a week, denuded of cobwebs, delivered of mice, canvassed by the invaluable Chuma. The Rosewater Hotel promised to contribute its Sunday band of four pieces, manipulated with no mean skill by worthy but unprosperous young citizens. Not one of Isabel's invitations was refused. The girls suddenly discovered that they were still young, and were as much excited at the prospect of a night's dancing as at meeting the English rancher. The men accepted as a matter of course, thankful to be asked to anything. The older people, surprised at an invitation to a dance, assured one another that Isabel Otis, being absurdly extravagant, and living two miles out in the country, was almost certain to regale her guests with fried oysters and ice-cream. One or two of her mother's old friends wrote and offered to contribute a chocolate cake, but were relieved when she refused to "trouble them." Gwynne and Isabel hung the walls of the big room with palm leaves, and branches covered thick with small yellow oranges, the first of the year. When they rested from their labors Isabel declared that it looked like an exhibit at a county fair, but Gwynne, never having attended a county fair, was proud of his handiwork and thought the effect an improvement upon the average ballroom. The day before the party Tom Colton and Hyliard Wheaton rode

out to Lumalitas and demanded of Gwynne if he intended to wear a "claw-hammer." Colton was averse on principle from being too "swagger"; and they finally compromised on what the Americans called their "Tuxedos," and Gwynne his "smoker." Anabel Colton, Dolly Boutts, and Serena Wheaton, after half a day's telephoning, decided to "wear their necks," and their hostess agreed to keep them in countenance. Every team in Rosewater was bespoken for the distinguished occasion, and the reports of the weather bureau were consulted daily. But the rains held off and the night of the party was brilliant with starlight, and not too cold.

Gwynne, who had no intention of receiving with Isabel, and learning from Colton that everybody would have arrived before nine o'clock, did not make his appearance until ten. He found the big room full of young and elderly people, even the latter chattering with an extraordinary animation, induced no doubt by the surprises that had greeted them; they had forgotten the existence of the old bar-room. From the dancers Gwynne received a general impression of pink cheeks, fluffy hair, delicate features, gay simple gowns, the usual lack of background; a curious transientness, as if they had been born for the night like summer moths. The men for the most part made a good appearance, the more favored looking college-bred and irreproachable. Hyliard Wheaton, who was really handsome, with his broad shoulders and cool smooth well-cut face, wore an orchid in his button-hole and was devoting himself to Isabel.

The hostess wore a gown of black chiffon trimmed with pale blue that looked simple and was not. Her neck and arms were bare, and Gwynne noticed at once that she had

another little black mole where the bodice slipped from her shoulder. She reproached the guest of honor for being late.

"You will dance this waltz with me," she commanded, royally; "and then I will introduce you to the prettiest of the girls."

For the first time in his life Gwynne felt self-conscious in putting his arm about a woman's waist for the waltz. He had seen Isabel in full evening dress many a time in England, in rubber boots to her hips, in divided skirt astride her horse, in overalls among her chickens, and in pretty little house-gowns when he had remained for supper; nevertheless, in surrendering her slim waist she seemed to descend, significantly, from her pedestal and become warm flesh and blood. He held her awkwardly, barely touching her, wondering there should be physical shrinking from such a beautiful creature, one, moreover, that had shown him more kindness and disinterested friendship than any he had ever known. He reproached himself, but even while he admired the luminous whiteness of her skin he found himself scowling at the tiny black moles that gave her an oddly artificial provocative look, as black patches may have deliberately enhanced the charms of their coquettish grandmothers.

"Humph!" said Mrs. Wheaton, raising her lorgnette, as became a leader of society. "He is not so fond of her, for all this friendship we have been hearing so much about. Well, it is natural enough. Isabel is far too independent to be really attractive to men, for all her good looks. These advanced women will have to step aside into a class by themselves, and as the men won't follow them, that will mean they will die off naturally, and the world wag its own old way once more."

She was a tall stout woman, with a pale heavy face, and a curious elevation of nose, as if sniffing an unpleasant odor; but which was really meant to express pride of carriage. She wore a somewhat old-fashioned but handsome gown of lavender satin trimmed with point lace about the bodice, and a pair of diamond ear-rings. On one side of her sat the elder Mrs. Colton, in black silk with a point-lace collar; a sweet-faced frankly elderly woman. The third member of the group was a woman who might have been any age between thirty-five and fifty, very thin and dark, with the curiously virginal look peculiar to childless women tainted by a suggestion of morbid sensuality, very difficult to locate. Sometimes it seemed to twist across her thin restless mouth, at others to gleam from her deep-set black eyes with a fleeting wildness. Ordinarily she was smiling with an affected cynicism, and it was plain to be seen that she respected her intellect. She was abominably dressed in a frock of purple merino trimmed with black velvet ribbon; but she wore a gold comb in her hair and a diamond brooch.

As the leader finished her remarks Mrs. Haight brought her teeth together with a snap and shot through them a little hiss. Mrs. Wheaton turned upon her with the gleam of the bird of prey in her little gray cold eyes. All the gossip of Rosewater was very old, scandal rare. "What is it, Minerva?" she asked, eagerly. "Are they engaged? And do you know just why he has come out here?"

"I only know what everybody says about his coming here—that his health ain't good, and he wants to make the ranch pay by running it himself; but that other—" She paused and lifted her thin shoulders significantly.

"Well, all I can say is, that if they ain't engaged they ought to be."

Mrs. Wheaton leaned forward eagerly, but Mrs. Colton said, severely: "That is just your evil mind, Minerva. You are always imagining things; comes of having nothing to think about but cards and novels—six children were what you needed."

"I guess I have as much as anybody to think about, what with having no help half the time, and a husband who wants his meals on time whether or no. And I guess I worked as hard in the City Improvement Club as anybody until we got all those concrete sidewalks for the town, let alone the parks. What if I do read novels and play cards for recreation? Too much thinking ain't good for anybody."

"Oh, never mind," interrupted Mrs. Wheaton, hastily. "But what did you mean, anyhow?"

"Well, as you know, I don't sleep very well, and I often get up and sit at the window, watching for the boat 'bus, and just imagining where the people who are out late, or up early, are going to and what they are thinking about. Well, I've seen him"— jerking her shoulder at Gwynne, who was now dancing with Miss Boutts—"I've seen him riding home from here as late as ten or half-past, many a night. He may have been duck-shooting and stayed to supper. That's all right, but he could go home just after. I for one don't think it's decent—a girl living all alone like she does. If he wants to shoot ducks, anyhow, why don't he join a club? If he does all his shooting here it's to be with her, and no mistake. I've said from the very first, it's downright indecent for a girl to live alone on a farm—no chaperon, not even a woman servant. I,

for one, think that Isabel Otis has done just as she pleased long enough, and ought to be called down."

"It is only natural that she should do as she pleases now that she has the chance, poor soul," said Mrs. Colton. "She never had anything but trouble and sorrow in her life until James Otis died. I wish he could have died when she was little and I could have brought her up. That life, and then her sudden liberty, have made her independent and advanced, but I can't say that I like it myself. I wish she were more like Anabel. It's odd they're not more alike, being such friends."

"I quite agree with Minerva!" announced the leader. "Isabel ought to have a chaperon. I don't doubt she's all she should be or *I* shouldn't be here to-night, friend of her mother's or not; but I suggested to her only yesterday — I had a little talk with her on Main Street— that she get some respectable old maid or widow to live with her."

"What did she say?" asked Mrs. Colton, with a smile.

"Say? The insolent young minx! She just looked at me, through me—Me—as if I had not spoken. Her mother always put on airs. That's where she gets it from. I had half a mind not to come to-night. But I wanted to see things for myself. If she does anything really imprudent, *I'll make her suffer.*"

This last phrase was famous in Rosewater. Mrs. Wheaton employed it seldom, but when she did her friends understood that she was not far from the war-path. Her color had risen with the memory of yesterday's grievance, pushed aside by curiosity for some twenty-eight hours.

Mrs. Haight regarded the radiant young hostess with a



malignant stare, prudently veiled by drooping lids. She envied Isabel with her whole small soul; she had never known the sensation of liberty in her life, and she stopped short of the courage that might snatch it. Mr. Haight, the leading druggist of Rosewater and an eminent and useful citizen, was a large stolid elderly man—he was at present in the little dining-room with other gentlemen of his standing and a punch-bowl—as regular as a clock in his habits, and devoted conscientiously to his wife, whom he took for a buggy ride every Sunday in fine weather. They had been married for twenty-two years, and for at least fifteen she had yearned to be the heroine of an illicit romance; nor ever yet had found the courage to indulge in a mild flirtation. She really loved her husband, and in many respects made him an excellent wife, but her depths were choked with the slime of a morbid eroticism which her husband was the last man to exorcise. The earlier fever in her blood had gradually dropped to the greensickness of middle-age, so that she was vaguely repellent to men, particularly the young. This she had the wit to detect, as well as the incontrovertible fact that her youth and her chances were gone. As a natural consequence her repressed but still rebellious passions diffused their poison throughout her nature. There were times when she was seized with a frantic desire to inflict injury upon some other woman, and at all times she found relief in sharp criticism, in flinging mud at mantles spotless to the casual eye. She passed for being very piquante and clever in a town where so little happened except the turning over of money, and where the conversation alternated between chickens and cards. She was sure that she scented a scandal here, and her very nostrils quivered with

anticipation; the while she hated Isabel more bitterly for taking a lover instead of an eternal husband.

"Looks as if she didn't mean to introduce him to us," she remarked, with an attempt at frigid criticism. "He don't dance so well but what the girls could get on without him. Isabel might give him a chance to exhibit his conversational powers—My! if he ain't going to dance again with Dolly Boutts! I'd like to know how Isabel fancies that!"

Gwynne, who liked any sort of exercise, and had been reading the United States Statutes the greater part of the day, danced with the girls to whom Isabel introduced him, returning no less than three times to the exuberant Miss Boutts, whose step suited his, and whom he thought one of the prettiest girls he had seen in America. Mr. Boutts's mother had been the daughter of an Italian restaurant keeper in San Francisco, and his heiress inherited a fine flashing pair of black eyes, a mass of black hair, and a voluptuous but buoyant figure. She had inherited nothing of the languor and fire of the Italian race, but chattered as incessantly as any American girl, and had the mind and character of sixteen, in spite of her almost full-blown beauty. Having an instinct for dress in addition to a liberal allowance from her father, she was always a notable figure in Main Street; and when in San Francisco was pleasantly aware that she was by no means unnoticed in the fashionable throngs of the hotels and Kearny Street. To-night she wore a gown of black net revealing her superb shoulders and arms, and bunches of red carnations that emphasized the red of her full pouting lips. She danced with a graceful energy and looked unutterable things out of her great black eyes while talking of the weather. Gwynne

thought her a creature of infinite possibilities, beside whom Isabel was a statue in ivory.

Just before supper he was introduced to the older women, and offered his arm to Mrs. Wheaton when two waiters, unmistakably from a San Francisco caterer, threw open the doors upon a hall that separated the ballroom from the old hotel dining-room. The startled guests filed hastily across to find a dainty but sumptuous repast served at little tables. Even the ice-cream was frozen in graceful shapes instead of being ladled out of a freezer in full view of the company, and there was such an abundance of all things, served with despatch by the professional waiters, that Mrs. Haight was permitted to consume three plates of oysters *à la poulette*.

"This must have cost a pretty penny!" she muttered to Mrs. Wheaton—Gwynne was dancing attendance on Miss Boutts once more. "Much money she'll save! One would think this was San Francisco, and some swell house on Nob Hill. I don't believe a thing was cooked in her own kitchen."

"I should think not! This supper is from the St. Francis, or The Palace, or The Poodle Dog—" Mrs. Wheaton ran off the names of all the famous San Francisco restaurants, to the ill-concealed spite of Mrs. Haight who did not dine in San Francisco once a year. "But as you suggest, I cannot imagine how she expects to make a fortune in chickens if she throws about money like this. No wonder Mr. Gwynne isn't good enough for her—but perhaps that's the reason he's selling off so much of his ranch. Mr. Wheaton says he thinks of putting up an office building on some land he has south of Market Street."

"To my way of thinking, Isabel Otis and matrimony

don't gee. She's altogether too advanced. Just you wait."

The young people, meanwhile, were very gay, and there was little doubt in Isabel's mind that if she lived in Rosewater and chose to revive and lead the old social life she could drive cards to the wall in the first engagement. She had been much elated with her success, but, of a sudden, as her eyes roved benignantly over her chattering delighted guests, ennui descended upon her: those ancestral mutterings in the soul that stir dim memories of great moments of a greater time, inviting a vague contempt and distaste for the petty incidents and achievements that make up the sum of life. Isabel had experienced this faint sensation of futility and disgust many times before, and although she was wise enough not to let it paralyze her will, and to turn it to account in holding her to her higher ideals, still she often envied the Dolly Bouttses, with good red plebeian blood in their veins, and no voices in the subconscious brain but those that bade them eat and drink and feed the race. No, she decided, Rosewater could work out of its present inertia by itself, and she began to wish her guests would go home; she was tired of their inanities. Her disappointment in Hyliard Wheaton, whom she had admired from a distance ever since her return, but who had never succumbed to her charm until to-night, had much to do with her sense of futility. He had read nothing, seen nothing, experienced nothing. He had no ambition beyond living in San Francisco and enjoying life there. His fine well-bred face with its high brow and smiling, slightly superior, gaze, had suggested—the more particularly, perhaps, as his figure was superb—possibilities both intellectual and romantic. Isabel told him

politely never to ride out without using the telephone first, and had her excuses already coined. At least ten men besides Gwynne were hovering about Dolly Boutts, like humming-birds about the nectar of a full-blown rose. They were blind to the fact that her voluptuous suggestion was but a caprice of nature. Although, no doubt, she would make the best of wives and mothers, she was as incapable of any depth of passion as the frail fluffy creatures about her, and quite indifferent to anything in man beyond his admiration. Up to the present she had found cards far more interesting, particularly as she had known all the Rosewater men since childhood; more particularly, perhaps, as this was her first large party. She chattered, partly by instinct, partly in deference to the traditional animation of the American girl; and it was quite likely that the ultimate man would lead her to the altar under the delusion that she was a brilliant woman with a genuine temperament. Isabel wondered somewhat contemptuously at Gwynne's evident enthusiasm; she would have given him credit for more experience and perspicacity; but concluded that at a party a man could only judge a girl by her exterior charms; and certainly Dolly had all her goods in the front window.

After supper they danced the old Virginia reel with great zest, and even a few stray waltzes, then all left together at two o'clock; the older women assuring Isabel formally that they had had a very pleasant evening; but the girls and young men exclaimed that they had had a keen time, a dandy time, and that their new hostess was too fine and dandy for words.

XVI

JUDGE LESLIE returned on the following day, and, sending for Gwynne at once, announced that he was ready to settle down for the winter. A partner attended to the business of the office, and the judge shut himself up with Gwynne in the large light room containing his fine law library, and examined his promising pupil. Gwynne was well read in the English Common Law, and in Comparative Jurisprudence, particularly in the history of treaties and the comity of nations. So much he had regarded as necessary to the education of a future cabinet minister.

Judge Leslie sketched out a course of study which embraced Cooley and Kent on Constitutional Law, compilations of Leading Cases, Story on Contracts, the California Codes, Civil, Penal, and Political, and Corporation Law. "The money is in the last," he remarked, dryly, "but even if you never succumb to these monstrous corporations, more aptly named cormorants, the more you know about their methods and needs the better, should you ever be called upon to fight them; and I have an idea that that is just where you will show your strength. All the great statesmen of this country have been great lawyers, and the great statesman of the future is going to be the lawyer that checks the power of unscrupulous capital, without at the same time delivering the country over to the mercies

of that equally unscrupulous tyranny the labor-union. There is a solution somewhere and some man is going to find it. I don't see why you should not be the man. I have followed your career very carefully—you have always interested me. You come here with a magnificent political training, a mind uncorrupted by a lifetime of contact with the contemptible methods of machine politics, and a really great ambition. Your eyes are wide open. I don't see why you should make any mistakes, particularly as you have four good years in which to ponder the great question before committing yourself. Four years are a long span. No man can tell what may happen in that time, what new party may evolve. All you can do is to watch events and be ready for the forelock when time shakes it at you. If it so happens that you can insidiously mould a new party meanwhile, so much the better. The wisest and most suggestive writer on our national life is a Briton. I see no reason why England should not send us a statesman—in the old sense. God knows, all that we have now are a bitter disappointment to those of us with any of the old ideals left. Should the Presidency be your ambition, the fact of your having actually been born on American soil may be the cause of a legal battle in the Supreme Court of the United States that will pass into history. Meanwhile, as all apprenticeships must be humble, you will be a sort of unofficial junior of this firm, sharing the office business for the first year with Cresswell, and the second year helping me with court practice in St. Peter. You can read in the intervals and at home, and once or twice a week I should advise you to attend lectures at the State University. I can see that your memory and powers of assimilation are very vigorous, and the more quickly you imbibe, and

the more varied the quality, the better. All the odd types of human nature you meet in this office won't do you any harm, either. Study the American character above all things. Get in sympathy with it. It is as opposite from the English as pole from pole, but you won't find it a bad sort—the country's politics are the worst part of it, because circumstances have forced them into the hands of a class of men that make their living out of them, and whose natural destiny was pocket-picking and the Rogues' Gallery—and if the best of us combine one day to do you honor, we can carry you to places as distinguished as any in your own country. Great and disinterested men have succeeded against tremendous odds in times as parlous as these, and others have the same opportunity here and now."

The judge wound up his homily with a little peroration on Abraham Lincoln and then left Gwynne to the California codes. The large new stone office building of which Judge Leslie was the chief tenant stood at the corner of a street a block above Main; Gwynne glancing over the top of his tome could see a procession of teams, men lounging in the doorway of a grocery store, and the spars of fishing-boats waiting for the tide. His mind played him a curious trick. Piccadilly was before him with its great hotels, its splendid old stone houses upon which the fogs and the grime of London had demonstrated their poetical mission, the classic entrance to the Park, the crowds of smart men and women; Piccadilly at eight on a summer's evening choked with broughams and hansoms, in which the light mantles barely concealed the shoulders and jewels of the women. He had loved the outside life of London, returning to it

from afar with an ever fresh and boyish pleasure, the keener perhaps because he knew that all doors were open to him and that he was one of the great lions, not of those for whom the stranger must search "Who's Who" upon his return from a function where half the guests had made their little mark. He saw the lofty towers with their delicate tracery, cutting the smoke on the banks of the Thames, the little room below where he had made men, old and bored and suspicious, listen to him; the more confident in his power to command their attention because he knew that they had read and discussed, agreed with and denounced, his sound contributions to colonial literature. The scene dissolved into a wave of homesickness that made him choke and spring to his feet. Then he swore at himself and returned to his codes.

When Judge Leslie learned that Hiram Otis's law library had been moved out to Lumalitas he suggested that Gwynne should read at home until he had mastered the laws governing the State of California, and the student was far better satisfied out there in the quiet and the fresh air of his veranda. When a point needed expounding, a horseback ride into Rosewater was not an unwelcome diversion. His will had triumphed in its first bout with memory, so subtly liberated by the written word, and before three days of close study had passed he had the sensation of having found a new and individual patch upon which squarely to plant his feet. The future seemed more definite, more assured; moreover, his avid brain, its energies too long in abeyance, settled upon the new and absorbing study—it was eight years since he had opened a law-book, although he had forgotten little he had read at that plastic time—like a swarm of locusts. He recalled

that a clever woman had once said in his hearing that whenever she felt blasée she took up a new language, and at once felt young and eager again. The remark had passed him by at the time, but he recalled it as he devoured and stored away the statutes that in many ways differentiated California from the other States of the Union. The mere fact that his was not the order of brain that took kindly to monotonous application, but inspired him with the more ardent desire to conquer; the sense of being on any sort of a battle-field again gave a color to life. He realized that in six months more of inaction he should have fallen into a constant and morbid habit of self-analysis, and although his soul-sickness could not be healed in a moment, the sense of danger gave an added zest to the impersonal nature of his studies. He subscribed for all the San Francisco newspapers and for those of his own and the adjoining counties. He was not conscious of any mounting love for California, but here his lines were cast, and California was as good a stepping-stone as another. If her politics were hideous he had not made them, and his reviving faith in his star suggested that he may have been born to redeem them. With the polishing up of the rustier parts of his mind even his eyes grew brighter, he moved more quickly, he began to feel all intellect once more, propelled by a body that was daily gaining in red and vigorous blood. Judge Leslie was so delighted with his rapid progress and his exceptionally retentive and classifying memory that he assured everybody he met in Rosewater and St. Peter that he was training a second Alexander Hamilton for the bar of the United States.

XVII

IT was four days after the party that Isabel, walking over the low hills among her chickens, in deep converse with her Abraham, was informed by Chuma that Mrs. Thomas Colton had driven out to call upon her. She found Anabel not in the house but seated before the front door in a smart new basket trap, and as smart herself in coat and hat and gloves uniformly dust-colored. She made a wry face at Isabel's overalls, but kissed her affectionately.

"This is my birthday," she announced, "and this is a surprise from Tom—horse, harness, and all. I only had to give him three broad hints. I wanted to show it to you first, and besides there is something I must talk to you about—very important!"

She assumed a matronly and mysterious air and dropped her voice. "I suppose Mr. Gwynne does not call so early?"

"Rarely. Won't you get out and stay to lunch?"

"Tom would never forgive me. He is sure to bring me another surprise at noon—it will arrive on the 11.30—a long chain made of every variety of tourmalines set in silver. But I couldn't wait any longer to have a talk with you about Mr. Gwynne. Until I saw you two together the other night I had all sorts of romantic plans in my head. It seemed just the right thing—*you* are so dif-



ferent from everybody else; and then having met him in England among all those old castles, and everything! I was sure he would have enough of California in a year and then I should visit you in England, and after a while you would marry Frances to a duke. But I see that was all nonsense. You don't care a bit about each other and are not in the least suited. I couldn't get up any sentiment for him myself; he is much too cold-blooded and, well—*English*. They never can be like us, no matter how hard they try. But in a way I like him, and Tom says he is worth any ten men he ever met. I feel awfully sorry for him, out there all alone—and it's a magnificent ranch—to say nothing of the fact that he must be worth a lot of money besides. It would be perfectly shameful if some San Francisco girl snapped him up—*and you know what they are*. He belongs by right to us, and I for one shall see to it that none of those man-eaters in San Francisco gets him. Did you notice how attentive he was to Dolly the other night? Well, he actually called the next day—she was out—and sent her flowers. Mrs. Haight saw him. She says he looked dreadfully disappointed as he rode off. I take that with a grain of salt, knowing Mrs. Haight; besides, he wouldn't break his heart if a girl was out for good. But the fact remains that he did call, and he hasn't called on another girl in Rosewater, much less sent her flowers. Serena Wheaton and one or two others were at my house yesterday. We are immensely excited over it. I am sure that if we managed them both properly there would be a wedding in the spring. It would be too delightful, for there hasn't been a bang-up wedding in Rosewater since mine. And think of Dolly's trousseau! Every stitch would come from New York. The San Francisco

papers would be full of that wedding, and St. Peter would be green with envy. And she would make him such a good wife; such a beauty she is and such a dear good girl—just the kind that wouldn't mind a man being haughty and overbearing. You two would murder each other—but Dolly! The more I think of it the more enthusiastic I am. We formed a plot last night, but as in a way he belongs to you, I maintained that you should be consulted. But tell me first—what do you think of it?"

"Of the match? I cannot imagine a better. What is your plan?"

"Last night Mrs. Colton had a bridge party, and I went over just as they were finishing hissing at one another over a spoon that cost seventy-five cents. After some of them had gone, the rest began to talk about Dolly and Mr. Gwynne—I don't think the town has talked about anything else since your party—except those everlasting cards, of course. Well, the upshot was that I suggested we should revive the old weekly dancing club. Otherwise they might not meet again for months, now that Mr. Gwynne has settled down to his studies and hasn't been near Rosewater since Monday. They agreed, but of course no one would offer her house; they are all too mean, and mine is too small. But we can hire the old hall, and all the men will be glad to subscribe—a few of us can make up the deficit. Dolly always looks her best at night—she has the loveliest neck!—and she would be glad of an excuse to get more party dresses. Well—you see! You can always sleep at my house."

"What fun it will be to have a weekly dance! I am going out to Lumalitas this afternoon, and I will demand Mr. Gwynne's subscription."

"Isabel! You are a jewel! Mrs. Haight was nasty, but I told her she did not know you the least little bit, that you were no dog in the manger. But, dear Isabel, do you think you ought to go out there alone? I don't mind; you know that I never bother my head about other people's affairs, but Mrs. Haight is such a gossip, and she never did like you, and all small places are *so* gossipy. She has been telling everybody that Mr. Gwynne rides past her house quite late at night from duck-shooting, and of course she assumes that you shoot with him."

"I generally do. You may tell Mrs. Haight, with my compliments, to go to the devil! Still, dear Anabel, if you think it improper for me to call alone on a bachelor cousin, I will pick up somebody on my way out."

"Do, that's a dear. And I shall tell Mrs. Haight that old Mac always goes shooting with you. I am sure that he does. Good-bye. I'll see about the hall this afternoon."

She drove off with lifted reins and a little flourish of her whip, and Isabel went into the house and telephoned first to Gwynne, who had installed a private wire between his house and hers, and then to Miss Boutts. At two o'clock she drew rein before a large brown shingle house on the highest point of Rosewater. Mr. Boutts had begun life in one of the little old peaked cottages down by the central square; later he had built an "artistic" cottage, and then a "residence"; symbolizing his increase not only by the more pretentious structures but by mounting the hill; the second cottage had been half-way up, the residence was on its apex, and could be seen by the envious traveller on boat and train. There was nothing left before him now but San Francisco or a balloon; heaven being out of the question.

Miss Boutts awaited the buggy, in the tiny porch, and had obeyed Isabel's behest to look her prettiest. She wore a large red hat covered with feathers shading into pink, and a claret-colored frock that fitted her superb figure in a fashion that caused Isabel to draw her brows together and suggest a dust-coat.

"It is too sweet of you," said Miss Boutts, as she sprang into the buggy. "I feel so flattered when you take any notice of insignificant little me. Do tell me where we are going and why you told me to look my prettiest!"

"I must go out to Lumalitas to consult certain farmer's books in my cousin's library, and I thought it only fair to provide him with entertainment while I am busy. It seems the gossips do not approve of my going out there alone, and as I was obliged to go I did not think it worth while to make a martyr of Mr. Gwynne."

Miss Boutts blushed and tossed her head. "He called on me and sent me flowers," she said, in innocent triumph. "I was so sorry to miss him. All the girls are fearfully jealous."

"Do you like him?" asked Isabel, absently.

"Well—a little. He is new, and English, and different. There's not much to choose from here, and I don't know any of the swells in San Francisco. I can't say he is my ideal—that has always been an immensely tall man with big blue eyes and a tawny moustache; and Mr. Gwynne is just a sort of blond, no color in his hair at all, and I never did care much for gray eyes. He's tall enough, and the girls think him 'distinguished,' but nobody could call him big. Besides, he doesn't know how to say sweet things one little bit. I went out on the veranda with him at your party, and it was a heavenly night, and all he asked

me was if I wasn't afraid of catching cold, and then he wandered on about American girls exposing themselves foolishly and wearing too thin shoes and eating too many sweets. Fancy a man talking like that to a girl at night on a veranda! I never felt so flat."

Isabel glanced curiously at the beautiful empty creature. Her black eyes looked like wells of sentiment, and her body a mould for a new race of men.

"Tell me," she exclaimed, impulsively. "What do you expect a man to do under such circumstances—to—a—kiss you?" She brought out the last with some effort, her old-fashioned training suddenly suggesting that she could better understand the downfall of the girl she had befriended in Paris than the vulgarities of the shallow.

Miss Boutts laughed amusedly. "Well, most men would have tried it. I never was one to make myself common, but once in a while—well! I haven't much opinion of a man who wouldn't snatch a kiss from a girl he admired to death, when he got a chance." She turned upon Isabel, curious in her turn. "Of course you are lots older than I am—twenty-five or six, aren't you? And I am only just eighteen. But I always used to watch and wonder about you before you went away. I knew you were not the least bit like the other girls. I wonder what it is like to be different from other people. I always feel just like everybody else."

"So do I," said Isabel, encouragingly. "It was only circumstances that made me appear different."

"But you know so much!" sighed Miss Boutts. "You speak a lot of languages, and you took all the honors at the High School—and then all those years in Europe! I wonder Mr. Gwynne will even look at any of us."

"Men like your sort much better," said Isabel, dryly. "Do be nice to him to-day, and entertain him in your own style while I dig through those tiresome books. I sha'n't be long."

Gwynne looked more than hospitable as he ran down the veranda steps to assist his guests out of the high buggy. When they had taken off their dust-cloaks and stood side by side he reflected that he had seldom seen two such handsome girls together. Isabel was far more simply dressed than Miss Boutts, but her little black jacket fitted perfectly, and there was a touch of pale blue at the neck, and in the lining of her large black hat, that deepened the blue of her eyes under their heavy black brows and lashes. Gwynne had never seen her look so girlish and ingenuous. She kept her profile from him and he saw only her smiling eyes and red half-opened mouth.

"I had to telephone to make sure you would be at home," she said. "They say I mustn't come out here alone, and I didn't want Miss Boutts to be bored while I was at work. I'll leave you two here on the porch. That will be quite proper."

As she nodded and went into the living-room she saw Gwynne turn to the lovely glowing girl left on his hands, with more intensity than she had seen him display since Mrs. Kaye took her black eyes and fine bust out of his life. As she made herself comfortable in his deepest chair she heard the girlish shallow voice launch out into a eulogy of the scenery. Gwynne responded with some enthusiasm; for a time there was a broken duet, and then the feminine voice settled down to a steady monologue. Miss Boutts knew that it was an American girl's business to be ani-

mated, entertaining, amusing, especially with Englishmen, who hated effort. Occasionally there was a masculine rumble, with a growing accent of desperation, and the indulgent little bursts of laughter diminished in frequence and spontaneity. Isabel lifted down volume after volume of the books on farming her uncle had collected, letting one fall, rattling leaves when leaves would rattle. An hour passed. She appropriated Gwynne's writing materials and took what appeared to be copious notes. The host suddenly excused himself and came within.

"Won't you have tea?" he demanded. "It is rather early, but after that drive—"

"Much too early," said Isabel, absently. Her chin was on her hand, her eyes were on a spotted page. "Mariana is sure to be asleep. Do go back to Dolly. She is one of those girls that can't bear to be left alone. I didn't bring her out here to be bored."

"Didn't you? What on earth do you want of all those notes? Are you going to write a treatise?"

"Of course not. Do go back."

Gwynne returned to the veranda. For more than another hour that sweet nasal monotonous voice trilled on. Then it began to flag. Then a silence ensued, broken at first by sporadic and staccato remarks, then becoming as dense as the silences of the night. Again Gwynne invaded his living-room.

"Isabel!" he said, in a low tense tone.

Isabel looked up dreamily and encountered a haggard face and a pair of blazing eyes. "I'll never forgive you!" he whispered.

"For what?"

"For what! Do you want to drive me mad? Take her home!"

"Do you mean to say that you have not been enjoying yourself?"

"Enjoying myself! I have been on the rack."

"You are the rudest—most unsatisfactory—I thought I knew your taste."

"Oh, *please!*"

"What do you mean?"

They confronted each other, Gwynne flushed and angry, Isabel coldly interrogative. Gwynne, who had been on the verge of an explosion, felt suddenly helpless. It was assuming a great deal to tell a woman that he saw through her plot to disenchant him with a rival. He could hear the descending whip of Isabel's scorn. Besides, it would mean a quarrel, and much as he resented her interference in his destinies, especially this last and most notable success, he had no desire to break up the even surface of their relation. So he merely shrugged his shoulders and said, with what calmness he could muster:

"Be kind enough to take her home. I will return the entire library if you need it."

"Oh, I have finished. I am sorry you have been bored." And she carefully gathered up her papers and went to the rescue of the weary Miss Boutts, while Gwynne ordered the buggy. During the drive towards the paternal roof Miss Boutts remarked casually that she didn't care about Englishmen, but otherwise had little to say.

So ended the social regeneration of Rosewater.

XVIII

GWYNNE awoke one morning with an irresistible desire for The Town in every fibre of his being. Barring London he would have liked three crowded days in New York, but as nothing better was available he felt that he was open to the attractions of San Francisco. He had not visited it since his departure on that brilliant Sunday after his arrival; he had promised to wait for Isabel, and his interest in it was intermittent. This morning he found his indifference culpable, inasmuch as he had had three letters from his mother imploring him to increase her income, and Mr. Colton had not only strongly advised him to tear down the block of old structures south of Market Street, and put up a great office building, but had offered to raise the money—selling half the land and mortgaging the rest. And if Gwynne had not revisited San Francisco he had a very accurate idea of its present conditions. It was uncommonly rich, and its citizens, always sanguine of its future, had been seized with a very fever of faith; they were selling out their interests everywhere else and buying and building, tearing down and rebuilding, until San Francisco threatened to lose its oddly patched and wholly individual appearance and become the Western city of sky-scrapers.

As Gwynne dressed he recalled his first impression of the city as he crossed the bay: its singularly desolate

appearance, in spite of what at first looked to be a compact mass of buildings covering some thirty thousand acres on hill and plain, and later as if a comet had rained down pickings from every architectural quarter of the universe. He had walked once to the back of the boat and looked at the line of little towns and cities lying at the base of the eastern hills. They did nothing to dispel the impression of loneliness. Whatever their individual names they were mere annexes of the great-little city opposite. When he returned to the forward deck the dust was blowing its brown volumes through every street that converged to the water-front. Those dust wracks, broken and narrowed by the buildings, lifted from the outlying sand-dunes, and following a law that had driven them eastward since California had risen from the deeps, had a curiously baffled, stolidly persistent expression, as if the old sand-dunes knew their rights and were determined to assert themselves so long as man left a yard of them free.

Gwynne, in his solitary moments, when even his law-books were closed, had recalled the stories of San Francisco, past and present, told him by Isabel, and they had given rise to many whimsies. California, he still all but disliked, but he wondered at the haunting memory of the city he had seen so briefly, and the odd almost pathetic appeal it had made to his sympathies. He had concluded that it was the pioneer taint in his English blood, and had blinked in sudden wonder before the fact of his close kinship, not only to that old romantic Spanish element, but to the brilliant adventurous lawless race of men that had made the city great and famous, then passed on into the kingdom of darkness leaving their moral rottenness in its foundations, and, pulsing above, all their old brave

indomitable and progressive spirit. Although he had found it no rival to his studies and his ranch, still he had given it more thought than he was aware, and not only to its picturesque psychology, but as the seat of a possible business adventure. To raise a large sum of money on the San Francisco real estate—the common property of his mother and himself—and erect a great office building of steel and reinforced concrete, would add enormously to his own and his mother's incomes, but on the other hand it would stand in the midst of acres of wooden buildings and shanties, and the risk of a great fire—whose momentum would sweep through any fireproof building—was one forgotten neither by the insurance agents nor the chief of the fire department, who was said to keep thousands of tons of dynamite in the city with which to segregate the always expected conflagration. It was possible that no insurance company would take the risk on an expensive building in such a quarter. On the other hand it was as certain as the present wealth of the city, that such a building would have hundreds of companions in the next ten years, and the undesirable, immoral, and generally drunken element, so largely responsible for the continual fires of the district, would be gradually pressed to the outskirts of the city. He felt inclined to take the risk, even a sense of exhilaration in it, as if indeed the dead and gone Otises had invaded his soul and demanded one more bout on earth.

There was another matter that claimed his thoughts when the law was at rest. He was suspicious and resentful of Isabel's desire to manage him; and that she had succeeded more than once, through her superior feminine subtlety, made him aware that two strong natures were

slowly bracing themselves against each other, and that on some future battle-ground there might be a heavy and final encounter. This morning, as he ordered his portmanteau to be packed and placed in the buggy, his impulse was to take the train, and cavalierly announce, upon their next meeting, that he had "been to town." After he had had h's coffee, however, he decided not to be an ass, and unpardonably rude as well. She had talked of this visit every time they had met, although one thing and another had detained her, and he could hardly explain to her an impetuous and solitary flight. He colored as he invoked her assumption that he feared and was running away from her, asserting his independence like any school-boy. Besides there was the launch. The idea of three hours on the water instead of one and a half on a slow and d rty train so exhilarated him that he forgot his self-communings and ordered the buggy at once. It was but half-past five. They would catch the tide; nor did the train leave until half-past eight. He presented Imura Kisaburo Hinamoto with a box of cigarettes, gave him the run of the library, and drove off whistling.

He found Isabel among the chickens. She had just opened the doors of all the little colony houses, and the hills were white with excited scratching Leghorns. She wore overalls and high boots, and the night braid of her hair was twisted several times round her throat. Gwynne smiled as he recalled the heroines of poesy that had fed so many doves and garden birds. No heroine could look picturesque in bloomers, and feeding chickens, but as Isabel came towards him waving her hand hospitably, her white clear-cut face resting on its black *goita* of hair

might have suggested Stuck's Sünde, in the Neue Pinakothek of Munich, had there been an evil glint in her light cool blue eyes. The fleeting query crossed his mind as to what she might have been if born in one of the generations before the pioneers of her sex had opened so many gates for the irruption of overburdened femininity. But he merely remarked:

"I am suddenly inspired with a desire to see San Francisco. Are you too busy? Are we too late for the tide?"

"Just in time," said Isabel, promptly; "and I shall be ready as soon as the launch is. Do you know that it is Saturday? You could not have chosen a better day."

As they pushed off, all the marsh and its creek was covered with a low white mist that gave it the appearance of a great lake, a ghost lake through which the little steamer just leaving Rosewater two miles above coiled its way like a monstrous white bird feeling uneasily for a foothold. Overhead the sky was covered with the pink fleece of dawn. The mass of mountains in Marin County looked black and formless, but above them rose the granite crest of Tamalpais, like an angular lifted shoulder.

"That mountain has marched north five feet in the last forty years," said Isabel, as she carefully steered through the mist. "Either that, or the earthquake of 1868 moved her off her base."

"For heaven's sake don't tell me any more weird tales about this country; it gives me the horrors often enough as it is. This morning the hills and mountain on the other side of the valley looked like antediluvian monsters just ready to turn over."

"Well, they have turned over a few times, and may again.

One reason we all love California is because we never know what she will do next, and because she is still primeval under this thin coat of civilization that is too tight for her. I admire England, but I could not live in it. It is too peaceful, too done. It is impossible to imagine any further change, for civilization can go no further. But out here—the whole country may stand on its head any day; and we may yet have cities as great as Babylon and Nineveh."

"Well, we'll not be here to see. This fog is just high enough to filter into one's very marrow—even your picturesque pioneer days are over; I will confess they might have made me feel that life on the edge of the world was worth while. I should have liked to lay the foundations of a great isolated city like San Francisco; but I don't see any sign of another big city. Los Angeles is a little Chicago and may live to be a big one, but nothing would induce me to live in the south. However, no man is ever conscious of the fact that he is in at the birth of a great city; our pioneer forefathers were just a parcel of adventurers crazed with the lust of gold, and with no sense of any future beyond the present."

Isabel leaned forward eagerly. "You have been thinking about San Francisco!" she exclaimed, triumphantly. "The old Otis blood is beginning to wake up! Hooray!"

Gwynne laughed outright, and for the first time without resentment; he was tired of having California "rammed down his throat." Isabel's eyes were dancing with so purely youthful and feminine a triumph that he could not but feel indulgent.

"I am growing reconciled to my lot. Here I am and here I remain."

"Yes, you are much happier," said Isabel, softly. She half closed her eyes and looked a trifle older. "It worried me dreadfully at first to know that you were unhappy, and that it was my fault."

"Unhappy!" exclaimed Gwynne, reddening haughtily. "I have not been mooning about like a homesick ass—"

"Oh, your outside was as tranquil as your pride demanded—and it was splendid! But I couldn't help knowing — feeling. A thousand little things appeal so directly to a woman's intuitions."

"Indeed! I am delighted to learn that you possess the common intuitions of a woman."

"Am I unwomanly? Masculine?" asked Isabel, anxiously.

"Not in the ordinary sense; but you are much too strong. No woman should be as strong—as, well—as psychically independent as you are. It is as flagrant a usurpation of prerogative as a pretty complexion on a man."

"I only say one prayer: 'Give me strength. Give me strength.'"

"For what, in heaven's name? What use have you for so much strength? You have forsworn matrimony. You disclaim the intention of going forth and entering the great battle of the intellects—having, as you say, no talents. You have isolated yourself from love, so you need no uncommon supply of strength to meet suffering. You will always have money enough, and you appear to have been born with the gift of making it. Even if you elect to be the leader of fashion in San Francisco, your equipment need not be of unadulterated steel. But I cannot fancy why you entertain any such ambition."

"That is the least of my ambition—although I intend to become the most notable woman in San Francisco, not only because I must gratify a healthy natural ambition in some way, and because I want my life to have a sufficiency of incident in it, but because it is a part of my general scheme."

"What is this precious scheme?"

"You would not understand if I should tell you. Men have no time for subjectivities—except poets, psychological fictionists, and the like, who do not seem to me men at all. Now, one reason I have liked you from the first, in spite of many things that made my American blood boil, is that you are a man, a real masculine arrogant dense man, with no feminine morbid tendency to analyze your ego, in spite of your Celtic blood. I met too many of that sort in Europe."

Gwynne, with his elbows on his knees, regarded the bottom of the boat and colored guiltily, while congratulating himself that for all her insight and cleverness she had barely penetrated his outer envelope. She had thought him merely homesick, when his ego had been tottering, his soul racked with doubt and terror; when he had spent long hours in self-analysis; until the law had come to his rescue and reinvigorated his brain. At the same time a wave of sadness swept over him. How little human beings knew one another, no matter how intimate. As he raised his eyes he seemed to see Isabel across a chasm as vast as the Atlantic; and he was reminded that he knew her as little as she him. She had confessed to the throes of what she believed to have been a great passion, but when he had rehearsed the story away from the influence of her curious cold magnetism and the sinister

setting of its recital, he had recognized it for what it was, the first violent embrace of an ardent unshackled imagination with positive experience, in which the ego had played an insignificant part. Her immediate recovery upon beholding the disintegrating clay, without one regret for the vanished soul, or even for the magnetic warmth of the living shell, suggested to his groping masculine intelligence, totally unaccustomed to analysis of woman, that her attack had been little more personal than if the man had infected her with the microbe of influenza. Surely a woman that had loved a man well enough to kiss him must have been stabbed with pity for the ardent vigorous life thrust out into the dark. Then he felt a quick resentment that anything so stainlessly statuesque as this girl—for all her trim tailoring and large black hat—should have been even superficially possessed by any man.

"Did that Johnny ever kiss you?" he asked, abruptly.

"Of course," replied Isabel. "Did I not have to, being engaged to him? Not that there was much chance, for I never saw him alone between four walls. Perhaps that was one reason that side of love seemed to me much overrated. I was happiest when sitting alone in a sort of trance and thinking about him."

"Humph!" said Gwynne.

The mist was gone. The east was a vast alcove of gold in which the hills were set like hard dark jewels. The creek was narrowing. On either side, and far on all sides, stretched the marsh. The guileless duck disported himself on the ponds, but Gwynne, for once, was insensible to its subversive charms, felt no regret that he had forgotten his gun. He came and sat closer to Isabel, wondering if she felt as young as he did in the wonderful fresh-

ness and beauty of the dawn. She certainly looked very young and fresh and girlish, not in the least fateful, as when she turned her profile against a hard background and forgot his presence.

"I think I could quite understand anything you cared to tell me," he said, smiling into her eyes. "Please give me your reasons for cultivating the character of a Toledo blade. Is it your intention to marshal all the clans of all the advanced women and lead them against the more occupied and disunited sex? I am told that it is a standing grievance in Rosewater that you will not join that Literary—Political—Improvement—and all the rest of it Club. I should think with your ambitions and—well—masterful disposition, you would assume its leadership as a sort of preliminary course."

"I intend to be a whole club in myself."

"Appalling! But what *do* you mean by that cryptic assertion? I told you that I could understand anything you chose to explain, but, as they say out here, I am not good at guessing."

"I am working out a theory of my own. It has been demonstrated that labor, capital, all the known forces, are far stronger when concentrated and organized. I believe in concentrating all the faculties about a will strong enough not only to conquer life but all the inherited weaknesses that beset one daily within. That is a minor matter, however. I believe that our higher faculties were given to us for no purpose but to create within ourselves an individual strength that will add to the sum of strength in the world. It is not necessary to proclaim this strength from the house-tops, nor to search for windmills—a positive enemy it would leap at automatically—nor even to seek

to improve the world by all the tried and generally futile devices. It is enough to be. I alone may not add greatly to this subjective strength of the world; but think what life would be did each individual succeed in making himself but one degree less strong than God himself! It may be my destiny to make propaganda without noise; but if not, the achievement of absolute strength in myself will move the world forward to its millennium one-millionth part of a degree at least. For that will be the real millennium—when there shall be no despicable weakness in the world, no moral rottenness, when each individual shall rely upon himself alone, independent of the environment from which the majority to-day draw everything good and bad, their happiness or misery. Nothing will ever purge human nature but the triumph of the higher faculties, a triumph accomplished by an unswervingly cultivated and jealously maintained strength."

"I don't deny that your millennium has its points, but would that not be rather a hard world? What of love, the interdependence of the sexes, and all the other human relations?"

"It is love and interdependence that cause all the misery of the world; they would be the very first things I should relegate among the minor influences, did I wield the sceptre for an hour. To women, at least, all unhappiness comes from the superstition that love—any sort—is all. Of course there would be marriage, but of deliberate choice, and after a long and purely platonic friendship, in which all the horrid little failings that do most to dissever could be recognized and weighed. Free love and experimental matrimony are mere excuses for the sort of sensuality that is shallow and inconstant."

"Ah! Then you would permit love to your married pair after they had probed each other's minds and mannerisms for a year or two? That is a concession I hardly expected."

Isabel shrugged her shoulders. "I am neither an idiot nor blind. Heaven knows I have seen enough of reckless passion and its consequences. The equipment of the mortal proves him to be the slave of the race, but at least he need not remain the blind and ridiculous slave he is at present. If I had married that man no doubt I should have loved him more frantically than ever for a time. But that would have passed, left me resentful of bondage, of the surrender of self. There, above all, is the reason I shall never marry. Impersonally, I believe in marriage, or rather accept it, but I purpose to stand apart as a complete individual, and subtly to teach others to drag strength out of the great body of force in which we move, until they realize that in time mankind may feed those creative fires, becoming, who knows, stronger than the great first cause itself."

"And I have been called an egoist," murmured Gwynne. "I feel a mere—well—Leghorn—beside this sublime determination to sit upon the throne of God and administer to both kingdoms. All the same, my fair cousin, I believe that it takes a man and a woman to complete the ego. I incline to the picturesque belief that they were originally united, and halved in some—well, say when Earth and its atmosphere became two distinct parts. No doubt it was a judgment for having accomplished too much evil in that formidable combination. Who knows but that may be the secret of the fall of man; the uneven progress of human nature may be towards the resumption of that state, only

to be attained when we have conquered the worst in ourselves and become pure spirit."

"That fits my own theory, for I believe that the two parts of what should have been a perfect whole were cut in two for their sins, and that reunion will come only when each has absolutely mastered the human evil in him and freed the spiritual, but this he can only accomplish alone—"

"Don't quote Tolstoi to me! He waited until he was old and cold to hurl anathema against the human passions. Theories upon love by a man long past his prime are as valueless as those of a girl."

"It was a theory I had no intention of advancing. I think for myself and pay no more attention to the excessive virtue bred by the years than to that equally illogical repentance or awakening of a woman's moral nature when the man has ceased to charm or has disappeared. That is a mere process, and no augury of future behavior. But you are always at your best when you go off at half-cock like that! What I meant was that woman has degenerated, not through passion but through ages of the exercise of her pettier and meaner qualities. In some, these qualities lead to malignancy, in the majority, no doubt, to frivolity—still worse, to my puritanical inheritance — and they are utterly commonplace of outlook. Matrimony keeps these qualities in constant exercise, because the ego loses its independent life, its habit of meditation, and is pin-pricked twenty times a day. It is by these qualities that woman chains man to the earth, not by her human passions. I am quite willing to concede that passion is magnificent."

Gwynne ground his teeth. He had never encountered



anything so incongruous as this beautiful vital superbly fashioned girl talking of passion in precisely the same tone as she would have talked of chickens. He felt the primitive man's impulse to beat her black and blue and then make her his creature. As Isabel turned her eyes she was astonished at what she saw in his. Gwynne's eyes were blazing. There was a dark color in his face, and even his mouth, somewhat heavy, and generally set, was half open. She fancied that so he looked when on a platform facing the enemy, and thoroughly awake.

"What are you angry about?" she asked, calmly. "That I devote myself to my sex instead of to yours? They need me more than any leader they have evolved so far. There are millions of women of your sort. I want nothing that your sex has left to offer. I will find a happiness unimaginable to you, in living absolutely within myself and independent of all that life, so far, has to give."

Then Gwynne exploded, and forgot himself. He flung himself forward, and catching her upper arms in the grip of a vise shook her until her teeth clacked together. "Damn you! Damn you!" he stammered. "What you want is to be the squaw of one of your own Indians!"

"Let me go!" gasped Isabel, furious, and in sharp physical pain. "Do you want to turn the boat over? Have you gone mad? I'll *kick* you!"

"Good!" said Gwynne, releasing her, and sitting back. "That is the only feminine speech you have made since I have known you. I make no apology. You need never speak to me again. Set me ashore over there. I can take the train when it comes along."

"You pinched me! You hurt me!" cried, Isabel in wrath and dismay. "I hate you!"

"And your sentiments are cordially returned. Will you put me on shore?"

"I don't care what you do. You hurt me! You hurt me!" And Isabel dropped her head into her arms and burst into a wild tempest of tears, like a child that has had its first whipping.

Gwynne laughed aloud. "We are running into a mud bank," he said, "and the tide is going out."

Isabel made a wild clutch at the tiller ropes, and brought the boat back into the channel. But she could scarcely see, and Gwynne with a contrition he had no intention of displaying offered to control the launch. She vouchsafed him no reply, and as she did not steer for the land, he retired to the extreme end of the boat and studied the scenery. He was determined not to go through even the form of an apology, but he was equally determined upon a reconciliation. In his first attempt to match his wits with a woman's his face became so stony and intense that Isabel recovered in a bound the serenity she had been struggling for, and laughed with a gayety that would have deceived any man.

"We are a couple of naughty children," she said, sweetly. "Or maybe people are not quite civilized so early in the morning. You may smoke, if you like, and then I shouldn't mind if you came here and let me teach you to run this launch—it is probably more old-fashioned than any you have undertaken. But as we no doubt shall make many journeys it is only fair that you should do half the work."

XIX

WHEN they docked at the foot of Russian Hill, Isabel suggested that Gwynne should leave his portmanteau with Mr. Clatt, the wharfinger that lived at the edge of the sea-wall and looked after such launches and yachts as came his way.

"I want you to stay with me if Lyster and Paula will come too," she said, hospitably. "They like that sort of thing when they happen to have a nurse. If they cannot come you will have to go to one of the hotels. In either case you can send here for your suit-case. You had better take the Jones Street car—"

"The track is bust," said Mr. Clatt, who was a laconic person.

"Walk along the docks to Polk Street and then south until you find a car—I think it turns in at Pacific Avenue. The conductor will tell you where to transfer—"

"Are there no cabs?"

"There are hacks and coupés at the livery-stables, if you care to expend ten or fifteen dollars for being less comfortable than in the cars. Remember our hills are little off the perpendicular."

She did not see fit to inform him that his business would not take him into the hilly district, and watched him wend his way along the noisy, dirty, evil-smelling docks with some satisfaction. Then she climbed the steep hill to her

house, over the crest. There were many cottages on this side of Russian Hill and one or two fine residences, but beyond one cable-car line little or nothing had been done to make life easy for the inhabitants. It was a bit of pioneer San Francisco. One day, no doubt, there would be a boulevard at its foot, the rough inhospitable cliff would be terraced, and set with the country-like villas of people that appreciated the beauties of the bay and Tamalpais, but at present a carriage could not mount it, and it made no appeal to the luxurious.

An elderly couple lived in the "Belmont House" and did all that was necessary in the present stage of Isabel's fortunes. She found the woman house-cleaning and the old man weeding among the abundant crysanthemums and asters in the half acre which still surrounded the old mansion. She gave her orders and started for the home of her sister. A belated trade-wind was screaming through the city driving the dust before it. Isabel looked down at the towers and the domes, the steeples and walls of the great modern buildings, the low city built in the days when San Franciscans still feared earthquakes, all looming through the torn brown veil like the mirage of a city infinitely distant. But San Francisco was rarely more beautiful than in a dust-storm, which recombined her outlines and the patchwork of her crowded generations into something like harmony. She looked dreaming, proud, detached, an houri veiled to allure, to inspire a new race of poets. Gwynne holding his hat on his head with both hands, in the valley, cursed the climate, but Isabel picking her way down the crazy old staircase, although in anything but a poetical mood, paused a moment with that sudden outrush and uplift that was the only passion

she had ever known. Such moments were not frequent and brought with them a sense of impersonality, as if she were but the vehicle of aspiring passionate souls long gone from their own clay, that rushed back through familiar conduits like volcanic fires, eager for the arch of the visible world.

But ancestral rights had short shrift this morning. Isabel's spirit was a very caldron. She not only still raged at the fact that for a few seconds she had been as helpless in the grip of mere brute strength as any peasant woman, but she was keenly disappointed that Gwynne had not understood her. That he might have understood her too well, his whole sex precipitating itself upon the new enemy, she would not admit for a moment; women, with a sort of dishonest mental confusion, invariably substituting the word misunderstood for failure to accept their own point of view. Above all, was she furious with herself. Instead of annihilating him with the dignity of which she possessed an uncommon share, she had been surprised into behaving as if she were the crudest of mere human creatures.

Moreover, her arms still pained, and she knew that they were black and blue.

At the foot of the bluff she ran into a basement doorway to pin on her veil more securely, and dismissed psychology as incompatible with trade-winds and dust. A block or two farther on she took a cable car which slipped rapidly down the western slope, across the narrow valley, then up another and steeper hill, all blooming with flowers in the narrow gardens. She alighted at a corner half-way to the summit, and walked back to one of those curious San Francisco "Flat Houses" with three doors in a row. It

was perched high above the sidewalk, for the street but a few years since was a gully, and the grading had deepened it. It was reached by some sixty winding but solid steps, and the little terrace, off at a right angle, was full of color.

As she had expected, Mrs. Paula was sitting in the bow-window of her bedroom, gazing at the passers-by with a sort of idle eagerness. But so were a hundred others in sight, there being no idler creature than the American woman of small means, who neither belongs to clubs nor does her own work. The shallow philosophers harp upon the boredom of the idle rich whose every wish is gratified; but as a matter of fact the rich are seldom idle, and in highly organized societies are models of system and energy; whether misdirected or not, is beyond the question. It is the idle woman in a flat whose imagination riots along the highways of the great world, who keeps an avid eye for change of any sort, and finds a fictitious existence in the sentimental, the immoral, and the society novel.

Paula, who lived in the top flat, ran down the two flights of stairs and opened the door for Isabel.

"Well! you are a stranger!" she exclaimed. "I was wondering if your chickens had tuberculosis. Lots have in California. I read it in a Sunday newspaper."

"My chickens are quite healthy. How are the children?"

"As well as can be expected in this dusty windy city where they have to stay in the house half the day." Mrs. Stone's children were notoriously healthy, but she was of the stuff of which the modern martyr is made.

Isabel followed her up the stairs and into the large sunny front bedroom. The children being invisible and



also inarticulate, were doubtless in the back yard. The room was vaguely untidy without being dirty. A basket of socks and stockings in various stages of repair stood on a table by the window, but pushed aside to accommodate the Saturday society papers and a novel from the circulating library. An opera-cloak lay across a chair, flung there, no doubt, the night before, and on the floor close by was a pair of pink worn slippers very narrow at the toes but bulging backward like a toy boat. On the sofa was a freshly laundried pile of shirts with detached collars and cuffs, which Mrs. Stone immediately began ostentatiously to snip along the frayed edges. The room itself was full of sunshine, which gave it a cheerful air in spite of the faded Brussels carpet and the old-fashioned walnut furniture, a contribution from the house on Russian Hill. Mrs. Paula wore a vastly becoming wrapper of red nun's veiling trimmed with a yellowish lace that by no means looked as cheap as it was. She was pretty to excess, one of those little brown women that men admire and often trust. Had she been thin she would have been bird-like with her bright darting brown glance, but her cheeks, like her tightly laced little figure, were very round, and so crimson that they excited less suspicion than the more delicate and favorite pink. And the brilliant color suited her peasant style of prettiness, her full red lips, her bright crisp bronze hair. She had a fashion of absently sweeping the loose sleeves of her wrapper and "artistic" house-gowns up to her shoulder and revealing a plump and charming arm; and the pointed toe of shoe or slipper was always visible. Her arts were lost on Isabel, who understood and despised her, but who regarded her as a sacred legacy from her mother; Mrs. Belmont had been

devoted to the pretty child she had adopted just after burying three of her own, and who had waited on her hand and foot to the day of her death. Isabel was always conscious of putting on a curb the moment she entered her sister's presence, but thought it good discipline, and only spoke her mind when goaded beyond endurance.

"I tried to telephone," she began, but was interrupted by a deep sigh.

"The telephone is cut off—we owe for three months. Hateful things!—they know we always pay some time or other."

"If you are so badly off would it not be more economical to make the children's clothes—"

"Isabel! Much you know about children! One can buy ready-made things for just half."

Isabel subsided, for she felt herself at a disadvantage before this experienced young matron; although she vaguely recalled that whenever she had presented the children with little frocks and sailor suits she had expended a considerable sum. But doubtless she had gone to the wrong shops. Mrs. Paula was one of those women that haunted the cheap shops and bargain-counters, and was always in debt.

"What a heavenly suit!" she exclaimed, her eyes roving covetously over Isabel's smart black costume. "Paris, I suppose. Fancy being able to walk into a store and order a new dress whenever you feel like it. I have never done that in all my life—"

"It was for that I settled an income upon you before I left for Europe, but if it is not enough to buy a new frock occasionally—"

"Oh, it would be enough if I could use it for that pur-

pose, but you know what my life is! If Lyster would only live economically—but it is dining out at a restaurant five nights a week—champagne half the time, especially if we have a guest, and we generally have—a Californian thinks himself disgraced if he doesn't give invited company champagne. It's all very well to brag about the magnificence and generosity of this town—when you can afford to. But most everybody *I* know, at least, can't, and when the first of the month comes, I guess the women all wish that San Francisco was more like New York, where they say every Californian in time avoids every other Californian for fear he'll want to borrow five dollars, and all the men let themselves go wild over Emma Eames because she's proper and doesn't cost anything. It's time we reformed instead of flinging money about like European princes—spending four times as much as you've got for fear of being called stingy. A San Franciscan would rather be called a murderer than mean. I talk and talk, and it's no use. A terrible thing has happened to us," she ended, abruptly.

"What?" asked Isabel, startled; she had lent an indifferent ear to the familiar harangue.

"Lyster has gone on a newspaper—the *Ventilator*. Fancy—Lyster a newspaper artist—making pictures of prize-fights, actresses, murderers, and society women at the opera. It was that or the street, and Lyster was frightened for once in his life. We owe for every mortal thing as well as the telephone."

"That is the best thing I have ever heard of Lyster," said Isabel, imperturbably. "But when he gets a respectable sum of money for a picture, as he did a little while ago, why on earth doesn't he pay his bills, and

make a fresh start? I thought he had when I was down."

"Those two weeks cost a good deal," said Paula, softly.

Isabel colored but controlled her anger as she had many times before. "I was under the impression that the check I gave you when I left—"

"Oh yes, but then you really don't know much about the cost of things, in spite of the fact that you run a farm. We always had an extra man for you—"

"I could well have dispensed with the dissipated fad-ridden specimens you produced for my entertainment. I did not meet a sober man during the entire fortnight. What is the amount of your indebtedness? I will pay half, but no more."

She knew that it would be wiser to demand the bills and herself pay something on account to the desperate creditors, but she revolted from playing the mentor to that extent. When Paula, after a frowning bout with a pencil and a sheet of paper, announced the sum that would tide them over, Isabel was quite aware that she was facing the entire amount. However, she wrote a check, merely extracting a facile promise that it should be devoted to its legitimate purpose, and not to champagne or frills.

"I will also send you down one or two tailor suits I have little use for," she added. "Things are so cheap in Europe that I was often betrayed into buying more than I wanted. They can easily be altered."

"Thanks!" said Paula. "I am not the style for tailor-made things, but goodness knows I am glad enough to get anything."

Isabel glanced doubtfully at the slippers. "I have so

many boots. They are rather an extravagance with me—but I am afraid my foot is longer than yours."

"Yes," said Paula, complacently, as she threaded a darning-needle. "My foot is quite *fearfully* small."

Isabel, who knew her foot to be far more slender and elegant than the plebeian member that never dared expose itself beyond the instep, nearly overflowed with feminine wrath; but she swallowed it, and remarked in a moment:

"I had quite forgotten why I tried to telephone. Mr. Gwynne came down with me and I should like to show him about a bit. Of course I cannot do it alone; what is more, I want him to stay in my house. Nothing could exceed his hospitality to me in England, and I should hate the idea of sending him to a hotel when I have a house with eight bedrooms. Couldn't you and Lyster come up and stay for a couple of days? And if Lyster will show Mr. Gwynne the town, as indeed he has suggested more than once, it must be understood that the expense is mine."

"Lyster would never permit it," said Paula, grandly. "You know what he is—he even lends more than he borrows; that is one reason why we are always so hard up. He is simply dying to show Mr. Gwynne about. And that means that he'll spend a month's salary before he gets it."

"Then I will pay the month's bills. You must manage it as I wish or I return to-day."

Isabel knew that Stone, if not generous in the higher sense, was delighted to play the extravagant host, and never failed to assume the rôle when he had money or credit. And if he was the freest and most debonair of

borrowers at least he repaid when unusually prosperous; and he prided himself upon never having borrowed from a woman. Once when Isabel, who could not help liking him, had offered to pay his debts, he had promptly ascended from the depths of depression in which she had discovered him before his easel, and replied, gayly:

"Not yet! The sort of man that borrows money from a woman is the sort of man that has no intention of paying it back. I am not that sort."

With a wife who was or had been an adoring slave, it was little wonder that Stone's original selfishness had become abnormally enhanced, and Isabel took into account the feminine silliness of which he had been a victim since birth. His mother, well-born, southern, indolent, had indulged him in every whim during his boyhood; then when the familiar San Francisco crash came, he had turned to actual work with an exceeding ill grace. The easy ladies of the lower slopes, with whom he had tastes more than Bohemian in common, had admired him extravagantly, and when he finally met a girl that suited his tastes as exactly, and was respectable to boot, he became a devoted if somewhat erratic husband. He was now thirty-eight and all hope of graduation from perpetual irresponsible boyhood had been destroyed long since by a woman abjectly in love with him and too shrewd to antagonize him. With a strong brain and character a wife might have kept him on the upward artistic path and converted him to a measure of domesticity. But Paula had neither, was, moreover, quite satisfied with her mental equipment and blooming little person; so much so indeed that of late she was beginning to think herself thrown away, a matrimonial offering; to weary of being the mere

annex of her brilliant husband. She was very clever in her fashion, however, and Stone still thought her his willing slave, although curtain lectures were less infrequent than of yore. And she had learned to manage him in many ways he would have thought it a waste of time to suspect.

"It will be all right," she said to Isabel. "He always thinks I have more money than I have, for he never could do arithmetic at school and still believes that two and two make five. I shall be delighted to get out of this sky-scraper for a few days." And then she asked, insinuatingly, if she could not take the children.

But upon this point Isabel was obdurate, knowing that if Paula once planted her entire family in the Belmont House the police could not uproot them. Moreover, although she liked children, she detested Paula's. They were pert and spoiled, untidy and noisy, although handsome and highly bred of feature. She never saw them that she did not fall into a sort of panic at the thought that similar little creatures full of present and potential nuisance might have been her own, and then felt extraordinarily light of spirit in the reflection that she had escaped a lot she had as yet seen no reason to envy.

"Have you no nurse?" she asked.

"Oh yes. She has been threatening to leave — has been *fearfully* disagreeable—but I suppose she will stay, now that I can pay her." Mrs. Paula wisely gave up the point and invited her visitor to remain for luncheon. But Isabel rose hastily.

"I must go home and see that everything is in order—the beds aired, and lunch prepared for Mr. Gwynne in case he should turn up. Then you will come about four? And we will dine out somewhere?"

"I'll pack all the decent things I possess and send them up right away. Fortunately the dress Lyster gave me last month is quite fresh, so I shall not feel too small beside your magnificence, and I am sure that Mr. Gwynne, even if he is an Englishman, does not dress any better than Lyster."

"Not a bit. We shall have some jolly times together. Mr. Gwynne is very anxious to meet you."

"Well, he has not been in any particular hurry Still, it will be fearfully nice, and I am so glad you have come down at last."

XX

IT was characteristic of Mrs. Paula that she was not in the least jealous of Isabel's beauty. She was quite positive that no man would hesitate between her own exuberant prettiness and a face and form that looked as if it had stepped down from a dingy old canvas. It was true that Stone admired Isabel—with reservations to his wife—and had openly avowed his intention to paint her when he emerged from the tyranny of the pot-boiler. He had hoped that Isabel would take the graceful hint and order a portrait, but Isabel had succumbed to the pleadings of too many students of indifferent talent, and had no intention of undergoing the ordeal of sittings again to any but a master. To-night, as the party of four entered The Poodle Dog—the socially successfully offspring of the still enterprising and disreputable parent on the dark slope above—Paula deliberately outstripped her companions and appropriated the seat, at the corner table reserved for them, that faced the room. Isabel was only too delighted to turn her back upon the staring people, for it had occurred to her to-night, for the first time, to be uneasily ashamed of her adopted relative. She had gone about with her several times since her return from Europe, and absently disapproved of a somewhat eccentric tendency in dress, but to all sorts of odd costuming she had grown accustomed during her experience of art

circles abroad. This evening, as she stood in her living-room with Gwynne and watched Paula sail down the broad staircase, she had a sudden vision of the shanty at the northern base of Russian Hill where Mrs. Belmont had found her little Mexican seamstress, deserted by her American husband, wailing over the child she was about to leave. This story had always inspired Isabel with the profoundest pity, tempering her frequent impatience and disgust towards the family alien, but to-night she wished for a few moments that her mother had sent Paula to a foundling asylum. She glanced uneasily at Gwynne and fancied she could hear him slam the lid of his breeding upon a supercilious sputter. Mrs. Paula's skirt and the jacket on her arm were a respectable brown, but there was something in the screaming red blouse, the immense cheap red hat, the blazing cheeks, the pinched waist between swelling bust and hips, the already lifted skirt—Paula always wore a train that she might at the same time achieve longer lines and more subtle opportunities—exhibiting the pointed bronze slipper with a large red bow and much open work above, that suggested, if not the French cocotte, at least that San Francisco variety known in local parlance as "South of Market Street Chippy." She did not bear the remotest likeness to a lady. She looked common, fast. Isabel wondered that she had never faced the truth before. It was as if a wave of final criticism heaved from the brain of the man whose life had been passed in the best societies of the world across to hers. But Gwynne was imperturbable and polite, and as they rode down-town in the bright cars Paula thought him "fearfully nice" and was quite sure that he admired her.

"We are fearfully late," she remarked, complacently, as she seated herself and looked slowly around the big room with its ornate frescoes and heavy chandeliers, its crowded tables and strange assortment of types. "But it is much nicer—to see them all at once, I mean," she added, untruthfully.

Gwynne, whose seat also commanded a view of the room, looked about him with much interest. He had a vague association of impropriety with the name of the restaurant, but he saw only a few painted females and queer-looking men. The majority looked as if they belonged to the higher walks of Bohemia, and quite a fourth were indubitably fashionable. But his more vivid impression was that they all looked gay and care-free, and that their personalities were not wholly obscured by clothes. After lunching or dining at one of the great New York restaurants he had carried away the impression of a tremendously fashionable school in uniform—the women distinguished in appearance beyond those of any other American city, but utterly unindividual. The social bodies of the United States had interested him little, but to-night he glanced about with something of the curiosity of a Columbus discovering the land of his fathers. No doubt his Otis great-grandfather had been intimate with the great-grandfathers of more than one man present; in this remote bit of civilization he almost felt as if he were sitting down with a company of relatives, at the least to a gathering of the clans. And he had rarely seen so many handsome women together, nor such a variety of types.

Paula, who knew every one by sight and assiduously read the society papers, volunteered much information

while Isabel ordered the dinner; Stone had been detained half-way down the room by a party of friends.

"That is Mrs. Masten," she whispered, with a respectful accent on the name and in the significant tone she always employed when addressing a person of social importance. "The youngish tall woman with white hair and distinguished profile. She is one of the old set—the one Mrs. Belmont belonged to—and fearfully haughty. Some people call her a beauty, but how can a woman be a beauty with white hair? Lots get it here and lose their complexions before they are twenty-five. It is the wind and nerves and too many good times. I wonder I have not gone off too, but I take a nap every day no matter what happens. Just beyond is Mrs. Trennahan. She never did have any beauty with that sallow skin and no feature except her eyes; but her husband, who was a great swell in New York, and often takes her there, is quite devoted to her, and they have a house on Nob Hill and another in Menlo Park. She is so exclusive that it is a wonder she ever condescends to dine in a restaurant; but Mr. Trennahan is a fearfully high liver, and this kitchen is famous. Mrs. Trennahan's mother, Mrs. Yorba, who led society in the Eighties, had only ninety people on her visiting list, and they say that her parties were the dullest ever given in San Francisco. Of course that was before I was born. The glory of that prehistoric crowd has departed, in spite of the fact that a few of them—not many—have kept their fortunes—and they are nothing to the new ones. The Irish and Germans are on top now and are just ruling things — people whose very names our mothers never heard, although they were making their piles without saying much about it. They have come forward in the last

five or six years with a rush. All the old leaders are dead, and their children don't seem to care much—just stand aside and put on airs. One of the new leaders has a brogue. And as for Mrs. Hofer — take a good look at her."

Paula indicated a tall superbly proportioned young woman in a simple Parisian black gown and an immense black hat with a cascade of white feathers rolling over the brim; she had a round laughing face and an air of indescribable buoyancy. "She was born and brought up south of Market Street, in the respectable part, but a dead give away in her generation: she's only twenty-six. I forget what her old peasant grandfather started life as, a peddler, probably, but afterwards he had a dry-goods store, or shoes or something, and he bought real estate, and his son improved it, so now they are rich. She was educated at the public schools, went to the University for a year, had two more in Europe, and came back with what they call presence and style, but is just cheek dressed up. She hadn't much show socially, but she didn't lose any time capturing Nicolas Hofer, the son of a German emigrant, who made money in the commission business which his sons have turned into millions. All the men like him, and as he was a great catch, of course he went everywhere; and when he married they had to accept his wife. She did the rest, and no one can deny that she is smart—in our sense and yours! She is a leader already, and has a perfectly wonderful house, that all the old aristocrats fall over themselves to get invited to. I'd like to go there myself, but of course I'm nobody. Hofer poses as a reformer, but I guess this old town's too much for him—"

"Nicolas Hofer?" asked Gwynne, with interest. "I

fancy that is the man my mother met at Homburg and asked me to call on."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Paula, with a toss of her head. "If you are going in for fine society you will soon have no use for us."

Gwynne, being unaccustomed to crudities of this sort, applied himself to his oysters, while Isabel made a fierce resolution that she would find another chaperon or remain in the country. She was disagreeably conscious of craning necks, and although she knew that she was beginning to excite interest in San Francisco, and was looking her best in a white cloth frock and large white hat, she made no doubt that her juxtaposition to the exotic Paula was the theme of more than one unpleasant comment. While she liked Bohemia and was entirely indifferent to shabbiness, she had never grown accustomed to vulgarities, and that they should be embodied in her adopted sister filled her with a futile wrath.

Stone hurried to his neglected party, waving his hand genially. He was a very tall loosely built man, with a sensuous laughing mouth and an eye that was seldom sober. He carried wine in his spirit as well as in his skin, and if the latter had bagged a trifle under its burden, the spirit was only depressed by the morning headache, and few men were more popular.

"Know what kept me?" he demanded, as he doubled a huge Eastern oyster—for the others Isabel had ordered the more delicate Californian, but Stone's interior demanded a sterner nourishment. "Isabel, you are famous. At first it was the men. Now it is the women too. It was like you, dearie, to put Isabel opposite that mirror where everybody can see her, but in which she looks just one

degree further removed from common mortals. Takes an artist's wife! No use, my sister. The Eggopolis must take care of itself, the chickens be left to roost alone. San Francisco wants you, and what she wants she gets—what is the matter, darling?" The corners of his little wife's mouth were down and her chin was trembling.

"You might have paid *me one* compliment!" she enunciated, between anger and tears.

"Good heavens, sweetheart, you are as familiar to them as Lotta's fountain. You are an old story—and always beautiful," he added, gallantly. "But Isabel! We raise the voluptuous by the score, Gwynne, houris to beat the band. Climate's a regular Venus factory; but somehow we don't get the classic very often. Too mixed, probably. Will have to wait another generation or two. Eyes, complexions, figures—ye gods! But noses—somehow they run to snub. Still! Look over there. Ever see anything more fetching than those great Irish eyes in a regular little Dago mug? She's worth three cold millions and I pine to paint her. The price would be a mere detail. But to return to Isabel. She has only to raise her finger to become the rage, and I want her to raise it."

"I wonder how much they would care for her if she hadn't been born into one of the sacred old families, and hadn't money to boot!" cried Mrs. Stone, exasperated beyond endurance by this triumph of marital tactlessness. "I'd like to know what chance a poor girl has to turn people's heads—"

"Tut! tut! Brownie, you're jealous. You know there never was a town where people cared less about money—"

"It's just like any other old town, only you have silly legends about it that you stick to in the face of facts.

That day Isabel took me to the St. Francis for lunch I never saw so many stuck-up-looking girls in my life, and they all looked as if they had just sailed out of New York fashion-plates. There are only about six really fashionable women here to-night, and they only come because they think it's spicy to get so close to real vice without actually touching it. For my part I'm sick of the whole Bohemian game, and I'd like to dine at The St. Francis or The Palace every night." She turned to Gwynne, her eyes flashing dramatically; she was tired of being chorus to her popular husband's leading rôles, and was determined to hold the centre of the stage for Gwynne's edification at least. "They pretend to come here because the dinner is so good!" she exclaimed. "Good and cheap! But it isn't that a bit with the swells—the women, that is. They just love the idea of doing something almost naughty, once in a while in their virtuous lives—when a San Francisco woman *is* proper she'd make you really tired with her superior airs and censorious tongue; but there isn't much she doesn't know, all the same, and she just revels in venturing this far."

"I don't understand," said the bewildered Englishman. "Are we dining in a dive?"

"Not quite, but almost!" cried Stone, refilling his glass from the large bottle in ice. "There is only one San Francisco! We have about six of these French restaurants —ever taste anything like these frogs in Paris? You scarcely ever see anybody in them at this hour with an 'all-night' reputation. There are plenty of other resorts, a good many of them under the sidewalks, where the dinner is almost as good but where a man doesn't take his wife. And up-stairs—here—and in a few others—well, if a

woman is seen entering by the side door she is done for. But then she isn't usually seen. Lord! if these walls could speak! The divorce-mills would explode. The waiters all invest in real estate. Policemen send their daughters to Europe, and the boss politicans get rich so fast they spend money almost like a gentleman. In the hotels you are all but asked for your marriage license, but in what is euphemistically known as the French restaurants —well, high-toned vice comes high, but the town is fairly bursting with accommodations for every purse. No town like this!" he exclaimed, gazing into his lifted glass and with the accent of deep feeling. "No town on God's footstool. Nothing like it. Wouldn't live anywhere else if you gave me the planet. Of course I've reformed, but then it's the *atmosphere*—not a taint of American Puritanism—European and something more—the wild flavor of a new and unique civilization. Precious few California men that go to New York to live but are too glad to come back; and Eastern men, like Trennahan, who have had a long taste of it, couldn't be paid to live anywhere else."

"So all the legends of San Francisco are true?" said Gwynne, who preferred Stone to his wife.

"Couldn't exaggerate if you tried. Wait till I show it to you. No blazed trail nor special policeman detailed to protect our precious skulls. I know the ropes and am not afraid to go anywhere."

"How do you like your new work?" asked Isabel, hastily, not knowing what he might say next. "I should fancy that newspaper life would suit you."

"Does! Never hit a job I liked as well. Jolly set of fellows. Up all night. What more could a fellow ask? No more aristocracy of art for me. I'm neither a Peters

nor a Keith, and I wish I'd found it out ten years ago. If a man can make a good living, what in—ah, what on earth more can he want in a town that gives him the best things in the world to eat, the jolliest all-night life, the finest fellows in the world, the prettiest women to look at, a climate that puts new life into old horses—life's a dead easy game out here—when you don't develop too much ambition. Ambition? Nothing in that. Fellows are ingrates and idiots that go off to a cold-blooded place like New York, with a beastly climate, the moment they have made a little mark here. No philosophy in ambition. Only one life. Why not enjoy it—when your creditors will let you? And the money always comes somehow—comes easy, goes easy, and if we can't all be great, we can be happier here than anywhere else on earth. Here's to San Francisco—and perdition to him that calls it 'Frisco!"

"So you have said good-bye to ambition?" asked Isabel, curiously. "I used to think you had a good deal."

"So I had. Once I was younger and knew less. Perhaps if I had ever done anything cleverer than a few dashing skits for the Bohemian Club, and somebody had patted me hard enough on the back, I might have made an ass of myself and crossed the continent in the wake of so many that have never been heard of since."

"I don't think you ever gave your creativeness a real chance. If you had shut yourself up in the country for a year—"

"I should have stayed a week. Scenery on a drop curtain is all I want of nature. No, Isabel." He relapsed into sadness for a moment. "I have travelled the logical road and simmered down into my place. It's just this: San Francisco breeds all sorts. A few are born with



a drop of iron in their souls. They resist the climate, and the enchantment of the easy luxurious semi-idle life you can command out here on next to nothing, and clear out, and work hard, and make little old California famous. Where they get the iron from God knows. It's all electricity with the rest of us. There are hundreds of my sort. You've seen them at the real Bohemian restaurants; young men mad with life and the sense of their own powers; all of them writing, painting, composing, editing—mostly talking. Then at other tables the old-young men who have shrugged their shoulders and simmered down like myself; lucky if they haven't taken to drink or drugs to drown regrets. Still other tables—the young-old men, quite happy, and generally drunk. Business men and some professional are the only ones that forge steadily ahead; with precious few exceptions. But you don't see them often in the cheap Bohemian restaurants, which have a glamour for the young, and are a financial necessity for the failures. Never was such a high percentage of brains in any one city. But they must get out. And if they don't go young they don't go at all. San Francisco is a disease. You can't shake it off. And you don't want to. To Hades with ambition anyhow," he cried, gayly. "We can admire one another—and we've learned to, instead of knocking the life out of everybody else as we did a few years ago. Now we present the unique spectacle of a city packed to the brim with cleverness and always ready for more. We know how to appreciate. *Vive la bagatelle.* New York? Why, the spirit and brains would be drained out of nine-tenths of us trying to keep a roof over our heads, and nobody knowing we were there. No, *sir.* No, *madam!* The men in this town realize more and more when they

are well off, and here is one of them." And he refilled his glass.

Isabel, not knowing that she had been listening to the litany of wasted lives, turned in disgust and cast about for an excuse to leave before Stone ordered another bottle of champagne. She encountered a gleam of amusement in Gwynne's eyes, and it seemed to transfer her to an empty auditorium, while mankind performed its little tricks on the stage for her sole benefit. It was a subtle tribute, and she blushed under it. She was also gratified to observe that Paula was boring him. But she glanced away, lest he should think she had forgiven him. At the same moment she saw a young man that had sat with his back to them, and opposite the famous Mrs. Hofer, suddenly push back his chair, rise to his feet, and look sharply at Gwynne. Then he came rapidly down the room, and Gwynne rose and met him as if lifted to his feet by the hospitality beaming from the large bright shrewd capable face of the Californian.

"This is Mr. Gwynne! Is it really?" he exclaimed, taking the stranger's hand in a large warm grasp. "I am Nicolas Hofer. Your mother wrote you? We have only been back a short time—I had intended running up to see you. I knew you for a Britisher the minute you entered the room, but the word was only just passed about who you were. Do—please—waive formality and lunch with me at my house to-morrow. Then we'll motor about a bit and I'll show you something of the city. Glad the fine weather holds out. No denial. I expect you." And he skilfully took himself off, before Gwynne should feel obliged to introduce him to his party.

"Now, what do you think of that for California man-

ners, and the arrogance of the rich?" demanded Paula, triumphantly.

"Not a bit of it," replied Stone, amiably. "Man was in a hurry. Can't you see his wife waiting for him? Never knew a Californian to put on airs in my life." By this time his optimism was complete. "Only women imagine such things. There are as many poor as rich in San Francisco society. Only some of us are too poor, and Bohemia is better anyway. Well, let's hit the pike. This room is too hot for my head."

XXI

THE Poodle Dog, a high new ugly building, stood on the corner of Eddy and Mason Streets in the very centre of the Tenderloin, or "all night district." For two or three blocks on every side there was a blaze of light, electric signs, illuminated windows, sudden flashes from swinging doors. There was much movement, life, laughter, carriages in the street driving from restaurant to theatre. And all beyond, east and west, south and north, was a city as dark and quiet as the grave. The hill tops were picked out with a few lights, but one could barely see them from this region that never slept. Nor could one see Chinatown and Barbary coast, nor other sections more picturesque than creditable, where the cheaper gas blazed late, and not even a policeman was sure of his morrow if he ventured too far. But here was the sound of music and decorous laughter, the clang of street-cars and the constant rattle of carriages: the restaurants were beginning to empty; there would be an hour or two of comparative quiet, and then another crowd would fill the streets, the restaurants, even the saloons; a crowd that rarely saw daylight mixing amiably with respectable but undomestic citizens that could afford to sleep late.

At present the scene was brilliant. "The San Franciscan loves the outside life as much as the Londoner," said Isabel to Gwynne, as they stood a moment almost

blinded by the lower signs. "In many ways you will find them not unlike—especially as regards fads. Wait until you have been really initiated into intellectual Bohemia—the clever young newspaper men and budding authors. I already hate the names of Ibsen, Shaw, Wilde, Symons, Maeterlinck, and Gorky. I am only waiting for them to discover Max Klinger and Manet—"

"Klinger?" asked Stone. "Where have I heard that name?"

"He is the great unconscious humorist of modern art, also a great etcher," said Isabel, dryly. "Have you ever heard of the *Secessionists?*"

"Of course," replied Stone, huffily. "You imagine that because you have been to Europe—"

"Well, *have* you ever heard of the *Scholles?*"

Gwynne laughed aloud. "If he has not, I should champion the octopus proclivities of California."

"They are the very best draughtsmen in the world—"

But Paula had no intention that the conversation should be general. It had been agreed that they should visit Chinatown, and she took Gwynne's arm and led him up the hill; she found his cool impersonal manner almost fascinating after a lifetime in a nest of horned egos. They walked up through the semi-darkness to Clay Street and down to Portsmouth Square, passing through an entirely disreputable region, but quiet at this hour. As they crossed the Old Plaza—now Portsmouth Square—Isabel explained that it had been the nucleus of the San Francisco of the Fifties, and that people had crowded nightly against the great plate-glass windows on one of the corners to watch the gamblers and the hillocks of gold on every table; and that no doubt their common ancestor, who was

a convivial adventurous soul, had brawled here many a night. Mrs. Paula, who knew absolutely nothing of the history of either California or San Francisco, hastened her steps, and in consequence excited the always smouldering jealousy of her husband. Stone had an exaggerated idea of her beauty and youth, and felt his own power waning, moreover had all the average American's Oriental instinct for exclusive possession. Consequently, as they entered the flaming bit of Hong-Kong on the opposite side of the square, Gwynne, infinitely to his satisfaction, found that there had been a deft exchange of partners.

He had been in China, and the sudden entrance into an illusion more complete than even the stage could achieve almost took his breath away. There were the same crowds of stolid faces and dark-blue blouses, relieved here and there with the rich garments of the merchants and the women; the hundreds of tiny high balconies; the gorgeous windows filled with embroideries and porcelain, Satsuma and bronzes. He was glad to stroll with Isabel through a scene so like a picture-book, and to exclaim with her over the novel sensation of passing from the quintessence of the Western world into a bit of ancient civilization. She realized the psychology of every violent contrast as no companion he had ever known, and when she told him of the adjacent Spanish Town, Little Italy, Nigger Town, Sailor Town, where representatives of the scum of every clime were no doubt qualifying for purgatory at the moment, he experienced a lively regret that there were places he must explore without her comment.

It was a gala night in Chinatown. Even the provision shops were festooned with sausages ornamented with bits of colored paper, and decorated paper or silken



lanterns hung before every house. Painted women with stolid faces, often deeply imprinted with misery, rolled along, and there were many pretty children in the street, painted too, and dressed in the gayest and richest of garments. On the balconies of the upper and greater restaurants were valuable jars and vases full of plants and flowers. They ascended to the finest of these restaurants and found a merchant's party eating at round tables from dolls' plates. In a room opening upon a veranda, their creatures chanted what sounded to Occidental ears like the dirge of the lost souls of all the Flowery Empire, and the expression of the relaxed haunted faces confirmed the impression. In large alcoves well-dressed Chinamen reclined on tables of marble and teakwood, filling and refilling the opium pipe with an infinity of patience that if otherwise applied might have led to greatness instead of dreams.

"These men are just on exhibition," said Stone, contemptuously. "Wait till I show you the real thing down in the slime. Lots of tall stories about Chinatown, but the reality is bad enough."

They took a Jackson Street car and rode up through humbler Chinatown, then through quarters of varying respectability until they reached the sacred precinct of Nob Hill. Here there was an aristocratic calm, but much light, and faint strains of music. The season was in full swing, and society was either dining, or dressing for the dance.

As they climbed the hill-stair Stone artfully trimmed the ragged edges of his wife's discontent. Subservient as she was to him, there were times when her temper flew straight and sharp like a blade too long hooped, and he had his reasons for conciliating her.

Said Gwynne in a low tone as they felt their way up the dark and precarious flight: "Shall you think me rude if I accept Hofer's invitation for to-morrow? And Stone wants me to do the town a bit to-night. I am most curious —but I am your guest—and I can come down another time—"

"I feel almost cross with you. This house is your hotel. If you ever go to another—whether I am in town or not—there will be trouble."

So it was that as they reached the steps leading up to the door of the house, Stone dropped his wife's arm, which had lain somewhat rigidly in his, and catching Gwynne firmly by the elbow, beat a rapid retreat.

"Good-night, darling!" he cried. "We're off to do the town." Throwing up first one leg then the other in black silhouette against the stars, he sang: "And we won't be home till morning, till morning—"

The voice drifted up from the corner of Taylor and Broadway, where the two men waited for a car. "Till daylight doth appear."

Mrs. Paula was gasping. "Well, I never—never—" she exclaimed, as Isabel hastily marshalled her up the stair and into the house. "I hope they'll be garroted! That's all! But it's just like the selfish beasts of men—"

"What difference does it make? Didn't Lyster agree to be host? It would be too dismal for Gwynne to roam through the purlieus with a policeman—and he cannot come down often. It's bedtime, anyhow."

"Bedtime?" cried Mrs. Paula. "Why, it's only ten o'clock. But I forgot that you go to bed and get up with chickens."



"I should think you would be grateful to go to bed early, once in a while."

"Oh, I often retire early enough, if it comes to that. It's listening half the night—all, is more like it—for the last car, and then for a hack galloping from side to side up that hill, as if the driver and the very horses were drunk themselves. I tell you it's a life!"

"And don't you get used to it?" asked Isabel with curiosity. "You've been married thirteen years, and I suppose Lyster has always been what he calls an all-nighter."

"There are some things a wife never gets used to," replied Paula with injured dignity, as she held out a doubting hand for the candle Isabel had lighted. "Haven't you gas or electricity?"

"There is gas, but why take the trouble to light it? And the candle recalls so many delightful evenings in England. I know no prettier picture than a procession of long-trained women, with bare shoulders, and jewels in their hair, each carrying a candle up a long stair beside the central hall."

"Ah! I have no such charming reminiscences of the English aristocracy, and I am only afraid of spilling candle grease on my one decent dress."

XXII

AT four o'clock Isabel was awakened by suspicious sounds at the key-hole of the front door. She reached out for her pistol, but withdrew her hand as she heard the careless laugh of her brother-in-law. A few moments later the two explorers, after an instant's hesitation at the head of the stair—which they had climbed like cats—walked past her door with a brisk swaggering preternaturally steady gait that invoked the memory of former occupants of the mansion. Then Gwynne's door opened and shut as if by sleight of hand. Stone's was at the end of the hall. Isabel inferred that he went through it, and a sound between a hiss and a smothered roar shot down the hall as he would seem to pick up the door and bang it into place.

Mr. Hofer had mentioned his luncheon hour as half-past one. Isabel had Gwynne called an hour before. She was sitting on the veranda as he emerged. He was as well groomed as usual, but he was unmistakably pale beneath his new coat of tan. She laughed wickedly.

"Oh yes," he said, imperturbably, "I was drunk. If I had not been I never could have got through it, not being a seasoned San Franciscan. I thought I knew vice. I have seen a good many variations, and in places where protection was necessary. But I had not guessed at the

combination of ancient civilization and the crudities of the mining-camp in the heart of a modern city. Stone is not a tank, but a camel. I befuddled myself successfully in those dives under the pavements—and we had by no means begun there: I should say we had patronized at least half the saloons in San Francisco before we started for the underworld. As we finally supported each other up the hill—we hadn't the price of a cab left between us—it seemed to me that I was ascending from a jungle of antediluvian men and women and beasts for ever and ever on the rampage. San Francisco is the most wonderful city in the world inasmuch as she not only exists but thrives on the top of such outrageous rottenness. And no wonder that the men like Hofer are desperate. We were escorted by a policeman after all, and he seemed to enjoy himself. The flash of knives — I saw two men stuck—made as little impression upon him as the awful abandonment of—well, of the females. Good God!—Well, I hope another variety is in store to-day. Hofer, at least, does not appear to be dissipated."

"Oh no, it is the fashion in that set to be domestic and good citizens. All you'll hear of the underworld to-day will be its relation to politics. They have been making a desperate fight to defeat the present mayor's reëlection and have been overwhelmingly defeated. The mayor is popularly supposed to be a criminal at large, and the party that supports him call themselves socialists, and are labor unions more greedy and tyrannical than any Trust in the country. Nice town. But we are optimists. No doubt Mr. Hofer and his party are already planning for the next campaign. If I were a man, I'd go back to the tactics of the Fifties and lynch. The city had good

government for twenty years after the operations of that Vigilance Committee. You might suggest it."

"I cannot say that I am in a suggesting mood. Shall you be here to dinner?"

"Probably. But you are to accept whatever offers. No doubt Mr. Hofer will motor you out to the Country Club or down to Burlingame, where he has a house."

Gwynne nodded gratefully and left her. As he reached the top of the steps leading down the hill, Isabel saw him pause and speak to a very tall very smart young woman, whom she recognized in a moment as Mrs. Hofer. Then the young matron advanced along the board walk with a sort of trembling stride. It was evident from her charming blushing face that she was as embarrassed as any one so young and buoyant, so successful and so Irish, could be. Isabel ran down the steps to meet her.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Hofer, in a light, high, cultivated, but nasal voice, with a slightly English accent. "You *are* sweet! I had intended to call in state the first time I could think of a decent excuse, for I have simply been mad —*mad*—to know you. But last night I told Mr. Hofer that my slender stock of patience had gone—flown—evaporated. I could hardly wait till this afternoon! Do you think I'm unconventional? I'm not really, except when I'm abroad—never here. Nobody is so conventional as the San Franciscan at home."

Isabel was smiling and trying to guide her up the steps. "I am more glad than I can say to know you, at last," she said. "Do come into my house."

"Let me rest a bit. The breath is out of me with the climb and the fright. Yes, fright, and it takes a good deal to phaze me. But you're the sensation of the town,



my dear. There have been all sorts of plans to get hold of you. People are simply mad—*mad!* I was just bound I'd be the first. Not petty social ambition, not a bit of it. I wanted to know you. And I stayed in a country-house in England just after you, last year. To think that you could have married Lord Hexam. Oh, what a jewel of a house! I went simply mad over those white rooms in London."

Isabel had firmly piloted her up the steps and into the house, and Mrs. Hofer sat on the edge of a chair like a bird on a bough, her merry shrewd sweet eyes devouring Isabel's face.

"Oh, but I've wanted to know you! You don't know what this means to me!"

"But why?" asked Isabel, much amused. "I am nobody."

"Oh, just aren't you, though? Why, you're almost the last of the old San Francisco Knickerbockers, so to speak. That is, the last that has inherited any of the beauty one is always hearing about from the old beaux. And most of them have gone under anyhow—in the cheerful California fashion: three generations from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves. Of course there are some left, but the most interesting thing about them is that they have been forced to open their houses to the likes of us—or sit down and talk to empty chairs. But the old Spanish blood is what interests us most. It was quite forgotten—all that old life—for about two generations; but now it's the fashion to remember it, and everything else early Californian. To think that you are a niece, so to speak, of the first nun in California, who had that romantic love affair with that Russian—I never could pronounce his name. That's

not what interests *me* most, though. It's *you*. To think what you've done! Those chickens! My man in the market has orders to send me Old Inn chickens and eggs, on penalty of losing my custom. All the *blasée* girls—the San Francisco girls *do* get so *blasée*, poor things—are threatening to go in for chickens. It would be a lot better for them than bridge. It is quite shocking the way they do gamble. Talk about early times!"

"Fancy chickens becoming a fad!" Mrs. Hofer had paused for breath. "Poor chickens! Tell your friends that they will have to get up at all hours of the night, and at six o'clock in winter, and five in summer, and spend a large part of their time in overalls and rubber boots. I fancy that will cure them."

"It would! No more flirtations! No more Paris gowns! No more paint! I'll tell them. But they admire you, all the same. And we are all dying to see you *en grande tenue*. I am giving a ball the night before Christmas. Say you will come—right here, on the spot."

"I shall love to come. I had intended to reopen this house as soon as I could afford it, and had hardly expected to pick up my mother's old threads until then. But a ball! I haven't danced for a year."

"It is simply fine to hear you say things just like other girls, when you look the concentrated essence of all our bewigged and bepowdered ancestors. To think that you've got that old colonial blood in you too, and are related to a lot of those old duffers one sees in the public parks. The next time I go East I'll look at them with more interest."

Then she sat still farther forward, and her bright face took on an expression of coaxing eagerness.



"If it hadn't been a man's luncheon to-day I should have asked you to join us. But won't you come down to The St. Francis with me? My automobile is at the foot of the bluff. We can motor afterward through the park a bit, and out on the boulevard. It is a simply heavenly day."

Isabel hesitated, and lifted an ear to the floor above. There was not a sound, nor was it likely that Lyster would make his appearance before dinner. Paula had announced her intention of visiting her children in the course of the afternoon; she would hardly awaken for luncheon. While she hesitated Mrs. Hofer began to coax in her eager commanding fashion.

"Oh, do come! Please come! I'm mad, *mad* to have you all to myself for one day. Chloroform them—"

"You wouldn't lunch with me?"

"I *will* entertain you first. Please, please, come!"

"Very well," said Isabel, laughing. "I doubt if they ever know the difference. I won't be a minute getting ready."

She ran up-stairs, and during the half-hour of her toilette Mrs. Hofer examined everything in the down-stairs rooms and nodded an emphatic approval.

XXIII

IT was nearly midnight. Isabel, her head still buzzing after a kaleidoscopic day, which included much motoring and many words, felt no inclination for bed, moreover was not only curious to hear Gwynne's impressions, but felt a pleasant sense of anticipation in talking the day over with him. He had telephoned that he was going down to Burlingame for dinner, but should manage to return to the house in the neighborhood of midnight. She wondered if he had met as many people and received as many bewildering impressions as she had done.

If she had cherished a lingering delusion that aught remained of the old proud reserved character of the society of her mother's time, it had vanished before the chatter of her hostess and the experiences of the day. They had not lunched at The St. Francis, after all. As they reached the entrance Mrs. Hofer capriciously changed her mind, and decided to make a dramatic descent with Isabel upon the house of a friend whom she knew to be entertaining informally, and where she was always sure of a welcome. The house was out at The Mission, a generic term in these days for the valley under the shadow of Twin Peaks, so sparsely populated by the *padres*. There were still a few large wooden houses, surrounded by grounds, that looked like country seats in the midst of that wilderness of cheap

and hideous streets; built perhaps thirty or forty years before, when "The Mission" was a suburb, and for old affection's sake still inhabited in spite of a thousand drawbacks. Isabel approached this place in a fever of anticipation, for it was none other than the old estate of Juan Moraga, and through a grille in its vanished adobe wall Concha Argüello had held tryst with her Russian lover, Rézanov.

Into this sheltered valley the trade winds and the fog came so seldom that, although it was a November day, the host had no hesitation in entertaining his guests on the lawn, with rugs under foot and a canopy to protect the complexions of the women. Here, Isabel found members of nearly every set the city had ever possessed: Mrs. Trennahan, like herself of the old Spanish stock, and her New York husband; Anne Montgomery and two or three others of the second régime; Catalina Shore, with her beautiful half Indian face and English husband; these few with a repose of manner that looked old-fashioned against the lightly poised figures and incessant chatter of the younger girls. And there was an even greater variety of garb. Several were dressed for the season in velvet and furs: one wore an organdie blouse and hat; another had hastily donned a checked travelling suit; there was no doubt that Miss Montgomery had bought her simple brown frock already made, and perhaps at a sale; her neighbor wore a black lace dress with a fur boa. The majority were excessively smart, whatever their vagaries, and Mrs. Hofer, most of all, in several shades of gray; not only becoming to her dark hair and bright color, but suggesting the natural plumage of a bird; she was one of those women that look so well in whatever they wear that it is difficult to imagine

them in anything else. Isabel, perhaps, although the sharp eye of a woman would have detected the absence of the hand of a maid in her toilette, more nearly solved the problem of a spring day in mid-winter, with her frock of white serge and large black hat covered with feathers.

She sat between the "Reform Mayor," whose guest she was, and the "Militant Editor," neither in the highest spirits after their recent and unexpected defeat; and heard much of that intimate political talk for which she had longed, although her mind wandered occasionally to that romantic past of caballero and doña not yet a century old, very difficult to conjure in this swarming heterogeneous valley.

After luncheon Mrs. Hofer had invited Miss Montgomery into the automobile, and taken her and Isabel for a long ride, chattering of everything under the sun, but with breathing spells that enabled Isabel to exchange a few remarks with her old friend; and between remorse for her own neglect and pity for that desolated life, she was almost effusive, and begged Miss Montgomery to visit her in the valley where Anne's father too had owned a ranch in palmier days. She offered to furnish a room immediately, and Miss Montgomery smilingly promised to obtain surcease from dinner-parties, where her portion was to enter by the back door—in nine cases out of ten with the ancestral silver—and take the rest she needed. She made a good living, she assured Isabel, but was educating a young relative for the navy, and lived in a flat that was largely kitchen. All her fragile wild-rose beauty was gone long since, but she still remembered how to put on her clothes, and her position was unaffected in

that devil-may-care city; she went into society when she chose.

Mrs. Hofer, on their return from the environs, left them for a few moments in front of a house on Van Ness Avenue where a friend lay ill, and Isabel made an enthusiastic allusion to the gay out-door appearance of the city. The broad avenue was crowded with men, women, and children, promenading in the sunshine. Every street-car was filled with people on their way to or from the Park, Presidio, or Cliff House. They had passed hundreds of automobiles and fine turnouts of every description, and out at the three great resorts thousands of pleasure-seekers.

Miss Montgomery set her well-cut mouth in a pale line. "I get somewhat weary of all this pagan delight in mere externals," she remarked. "It is all so superficial and deceptive, although sincere enough in its ebullitions. I can tell you, my dear idealist—you have not changed a particle, by the way—that there is another side you have never seen. I doubt if you ever would see it, even if you came to live in the town." The automobile stood on a corner. Miss Montgomery indicated the rise and fall of the hillside, east and west of the avenue. "Look at all those shabby-genteel rows of houses, each exactly like the next, each with its awful bow window, and all needing a new coat of paint. So are the lives inside. And there are miles of them. There are just four sorts of people in this town—ignoring its underworld—that get any real enjoyment out of life: those that are wealthy enough to command constant variety; the careless clever Bohemians with their wits always on the alert and plenty of congenial work; the club women; the laboring class, that get the

highest wages on earth and are as happy as beasts of the field on a bright warm winter's day like this. But oh, the thousands and thousands of mere mortals that are mired in their ruts and no longer even plan to climb out! There is no more chance for those people—who are in some little business, or are clerks, or small professional men, or fractions in the great corporations—to mention but a few examples—no more chance for them than in any of the older cities; for San Francisco has gone at such a pace that she has as many ruts as if centuries had plowed her, and those in the ruts might as well be on Lone Mountain. They—the women particularly—have the tedium vitæ in an acuter form than you have seen anywhere in Europe, for over there the centuries have mellowed and enriched life; there is something besides this eternal climate which can never take the place of art. Of course there was a day when every man had an equal chance, but that day has passed long since. And then in Europe," she went on, the minor note in her voice becoming more plaintive, although she was too well bred to whine, "you are always near some other place. You can save your money for a few months and command a change of scene. Here you have to travel three thousand miles to find a change of accent. I often have the delusion that California is on Mars. And the climate! Day after day, when I walk down that shabby hill with menus revolving in my head, or take the boat across that sparkling bay—I have customers all about—I long for the extremes of seasons they have in the East—fogs and four months of intermittent rain are only an irritant to one's natural love of variety. I long for the excitement of wading through snow drifts. I wish we would have a war. I should love to hear the

shells hissing overhead, to see great buildings collapse, people rushing about in a mad state of excitement—anything, anything, to relieve the monotony of this isolated bit of semi-civilization—where, I can tell you, more women meditate suicide from pure ennui than in any city on earth!"

Isabel was appalled by this outburst. The brilliant day seemed faded, the bright faces were grinning masks. Then she experienced a powerful rush of loyalty towards this stranded member of her own class, and before she realized what she was saying, she had offered to send her to Europe to finish the musical education begun in her promising youth.

"Don't be angry," she stammered, knowing the intense pride of the impoverished American. "Why not? We are really related. I am quite alone. My little fortune has almost doubled. I make much more than I can spend. It would be quite shocking if I did not do something for some one—there is Paula of course, but it is against my principle to do too much for any woman with a husband. Do—please—"

Miss Montgomery, who had flushed deeply and averted her head, turned suddenly with a smile and a light in her eyes that, with the color in her cheeks, made her look young for a moment.

"Th t was just like you!" she exclaimed. "I remember in Rosewater, when you were a little thing, you used to give away the clothes on your back, and your toys never lasted a week; although you beat the children and pulled them about by the hair when they didn't play to suit you. I saw you on the street just after your return from Europe —you looked as if you had wrapped yourself up in the

pride of your nature—had found a plane apart from common mortals. For that reason I did not remind you of my existence. But I should have remembered that you had had trouble and care enough to freeze any woman of your inheritances into a sort of animated Revolutionary statue. But you are just the same old Isabel. It makes me feel young again."

"And you will go?" asked Isabel, eagerly.

Miss Montgomery shook her head. "No," she said, sadly. "It is too late. I am thirty-five. If you have made no place for yourself by that time in America you belong by a sort of divine decree to the treadmill. And the limberness has gone out of my fingers as out of my mind. Sometimes I deluge my pillow; but I will confess to you that down deep there is a consciousness of bluntness, and it makes me inconsistently satisfied to be here in this land of climate and plenty, instead of in Boston or New York, where both climatic and social conditions are so terribly stern for the poor. After all, the word 'struggle' is a mere euphemism out here, and I am still asked to nearly all of the big parties; not one of the older set has dropped me, and I could go out constantly if I chose. But I have neither the energy nor the money. I could have presents of ball gowns, but of course I won't accept them." She laid her hand on Isabel's. "Don't imagine that I do not appreciate your generosity. I shall never forget it—nor the dear childish awkward spontaneity of its expression. But here I stay and rot."

"I heard this same lament from Lyster the other night; only he was more cheerful about it—possibly because he has other surcease—"

"Don't waste any sympathy on us," said Miss Montgomery, contemptuously. "There never was such a sieve as California—San Francisco—for separating the wheat from the chaff—for determining the survival of the fittest. If I had been worth my salt I should have conquered every obstacle, overcome the family will, when I was young and full of hope and vigor. So would Lyster Stone. San Francisco is stronger than we are. That is the truth in a nutshell. Those that are stronger than she have gone. The rest don't matter. And as so many of those that are really gifted enjoy themselves with only an occasional spasm of self-disgust, they are not greatly to be pitied. By and by they will outgrow even that, and congratulate themselves that they were not of those that fled from the good things of life."

Mrs. Hofer ran down the steps and into her automobile. "I simply—couldn't—get—away," she cried between the agonized thumpings of the engine. "But perhaps you were glad to be rid of me a bit. Please don't say so, though. It would make me simply miserable."

As the car glided off, she sat on the edge of the seat facing her guests, lightly, and with the same backward sweep of her body as when walking. She always seemed to be fairly bursting with youthful energy, and no bird could rival her buoyancy. She immediately assumed the burden of the conversation.

"Dear Miss Otis! I have been meaning all day to ask you about Lady Victoria Gwynne, but so many things have put it out of my head. What do you think of her? I am simply mad to know. I never met any one who interested half so much; I couldn't make her out the least little bit. The only time when she seemed quite alive

was when she spoke of her Jack. In the famous Elton she didn't seem to take any interest at all. I fancy they've fallen out, for whenever his name was mentioned—and Mr. Hofer admires him immensely—she always became as mute as a mummy. It put me out a bit. I'm not used to that sort of treatment. When I want to talk about a subject, I am in the habit of doing so. Lady Victoria is not a bit simple like so many English great ladies. Perhaps it's the Spanish blood, or perhaps it's because she's so *blasée*. They *do* tell stories! I never heard any received woman accused of having had quite so many—well, at least in this town, when a woman is openly larky she soon finds herself on the north side of the fence. There was my Lady Victoria hobnobbing with all the royalties at Homburg. But what interested me most was her attitude to Sir Cadge Vanneck—"

"What?" Isabel sat erect. "Has Sir Cadge Vanneck returned from Africa? I thought something besides ill health was detaining her. Do you think they will marry? I don't know whether Mr. Gwynne would like it or not. He looks forward to her arrival—"

"I can see Lady Victoria on a California ranch! She would yawn her head off. London is 'the world' in quotation marks. She couldn't, that seasoned lady, stay out of it six months. But about Sir Cadge—that was the final mystery. It actually kept me awake one night. You know the story, how devoted he was for about two years, and then how he ran away when her husband was killed, for fear he would have to marry her. Nobody knew exactly how she felt about it, for one thing must be said for the people of those effete old civilizations: their breeding carries them through any crisis without the turn



of a hair. But the report was that she showed an inner convulsion in subtle outer vibrations, or people imagined she did, probably because she'd got to that age where she couldn't have many illusions left. Then, suddenly, this summer, he returns, and follows her to Homburg. He is all devotion. She is an iceberg. And she's gone off dreadfully. I saw her seven years ago at Covent Garden, and she was the handsomest thing I ever looked at. She's handsome yet, but her muscles are getting that loose look and her eyes are bottomless pits of ennui. Save me from being a fashionable demimondaine. Better go to the deuce and die in a garret. Something honest in that, anyhow—and more picturesque. There may be something behind, that we don't know anything about, but in my opinion she is not the happiest of women; and with such a handsome and agreeable man as Sir Cadge Vanneck at her feet, she is just an ingrate. We are not here, already? I wish I were not invited this evening, I'd simply *make* you come home to dinner. And it seems so rude to leave you at the foot of this bluff; but there is just one thing the automobile can't do—"

Isabel, her head spinning with many words, had been glad to express her pleasure in the day's entertainment and run up the steps to her refuge on the heights. She had found that Mr. Stone was still in bed and likely to remain there, and a haughty note from Paula announcing that she had returned to her children and should remain where she was wanted.

She was vaguely planning to "do something" for Anne Montgomery, and congratulating herself that she could fly at will from people that talked too much, when she heard Gwynne's long stride on the plank walk, and

called gayly to him out of the darkness "to stand and deliver."

"I hope you carry a pistol," she added, anxiously, as he ran up the steps. "I scarcely ever pick up a newspaper without reading of a hold-up, and there were four on this hill last week. We change, out here, but we don't seem to improve much."



XXIV

"I HAVE had what is called a full day," said Gwynne, as he sank into a chair beside Isabel. "Lunch with half a dozen of the cleverest and most strenuous men I ever met—and not at Hofer's house, by the way, but out at the Cliff House, up in a tower, where we had a superb view of the ocean and Golden Gate; then motored about the city for three hours, then down to Burlingame for dinner, then back to supper at one of the restaurants. After over a year of social suspension I hardly knew how to behave, especially to all the pretty women I met at the Club House at Burlingame,—who seemed to expect me to pay them compliments and flirt desperately. I feel worn out, and on the verge of sighing for my lonely ranch."

"But you have enjoyed yourself," said Isabel, smiling. "It has done you a lot of good. You must grow straight downward to your roots. Then, when you shoot up again you will be a real American."

Gwynne made a wry face. "Not yet. Mrs. Hofer's father, Mr. Toole (who is now retired and spends most of his time in about the most luxurious library I ever saw —we alighted in it for a few moments before swooping down to Burlingame) quoted Byron to me and is well up in English politics. There were several London newspapers and reviews on the table. Moreover, at the luncheon, Elton Gwynne was actually discussed for a few

moments. All of which gave me pangs of homesickness. But although they are all sufficiently versed in British politics, their interest is very casual. Even national matters don't concern them particularly. What absorbs them is the redemption of San Francisco; and after my experiences last night I can't say I am surprised. The sort of municipal government that permits and battens upon an unlimited variety of open vice must devour the entire city in time. Mr. Toole informed me, in the holy calm of his library, that reform is impossible; and certainly the professional grafters seem to be one of the few productions of this State whose energy is not demoralized by the climate. But that must make the fight more interesting. And hardly a degree less menacing is this gigantic octapus of labor unionism—of inexcusable socialism. Well, we shall see! It makes one tingle."

"And do you never, in your inmost, contemplate returning to England?" asked Isabel, curiously.

Gwynne swung about and planted his elbows on the railing, clasping his hands about his head. For some moments he seemed absorbed in the mass of lights at the foot of the black hillside. "I don't know," he said, finally. "It is possible that only my will keeps me from thinking about it. It may be that, having made up my mind before leaving England, I accomplished a final wrench and adjustment. I abstain from too much self-analysis; but it is certain that down deep I often feel a tug at familiar strings. I don't pretend to know myself, for after all what is each one of us but the composite of the race, always at war with a spark of individuality. Some fine morning I may wake up, order my trunk to be packed, and take the first train out of California."

"Oh, might you?"

"Well, of course, I should stop and say good-bye to you. That is if I did not fall into a panic at the thought of a final encounter with that terrible will of yours." He turned and met a pair of eyes that were shining like a cat's in the dark. "You know that you have been manipulating the strings of my destiny!" he said, abruptly, and surprised at himself. "I grew fearful of self-analysis and buried myself in the law—jolly good antidote—but I am always conscious of a subtle pressure on my will—was. I have thrown it off. It was either that or leave."

"Perhaps you have felt freer since Saturday morning," said Isabel, cruelly.

His own eyes glittered, but if he blushed the darkness screened him. "Quite true," he said, dryly. "The man-brute turned. And in the final battle, when the feminine principle is pitted against the masculine, I fancy we shall know how to win the day. If we resort to primitive methods it will be your own fault."

"I was invited for dinner to-morrow night, and had to decline because my arms are black-and-blue."

"I don't repent," said Gwynne, doggedly.

There was another silence, and then he asked: "Haven't you been trying to manage me?"

"I have only been trying to steer you in a new country—to make things a little easier—"

"You are not always frank. And that is not altogether what I mean. I hardly know myself what I do mean. Before I arrived I thought it likely I should ma—want to marry you. In many respects you were designed to be the wife of an ambitious public man. With your beauty, and brains, your grand manner, and your subtlety—but

it is the last that has put me off. I have seen too many men managed by their wives. I never could stand it. Doubtless my Celtic blood gives me the tiniest feminine drop. It is only the big uncomplicated oafs that don't mind being managed by their women. I should want the freest and most open companionship, but with my will always in the ascendant—although no man would be more indulgent to his wife."

"You will find thousands to answer all your requirements and limitations."

"Much you know about it. True, this place is full of handsome and attractive women—topping! And they have a free wild grace, a stride, a swing—it is wonderful to watch them go up these hills. And I was vastly entertained at luncheon, and at one or two of the houses where I was afterward taken to call. But I doubt if I shall ever find any one again that possesses so many remarkable qualities in combination as your own puzzling unsatisfactory self."

"I am not in the least like Mrs. Kaye, and you thought she combined every quality under the sun."

"I expended the last of my calf love on Mrs. Kaye. I was blinded by passion; but that my emotional depths were not even stirred was manifested by the rapidity of my convalescence. We were utterly unsuited. In many respects I should have been ashamed of her. Blood must always tell in England—although in America—if Mrs. Hofer is a type—well, this is the land of reversed theories. Mrs. Kaye and I would have been at swords' points in less than a year. The next time I choose a wife it will be with my judgment."

"And are you no longer capable of love?"

"Oh, love!" Once more Gwynne gazed down upon the sleepless city, where the lights seemed to powder the upper air with gold dust. "Perhaps. It seemed to me that day in Park Lane that all the heat died out of my veins. I am only just beginning to feel alive once more. But I have no wish as yet to experience the passion of love again—not even with you; although if you would cry off in some respects I don't know but that I should still like to marry you."

"At least you could beat me if I did not behave."

He laughed. "I don't doubt I should want to. No, I'll never let myself go like that again; but I should be sure first that my will was the stronger of the two."

"You carefully abstain from proposing so that I cannot make the retort I should like to."

"You may. I know you won't have me. But that does not alter the fact that the same ancestral lines have given us an inconceivable number of molecules that are subtly responsive. The great cleavage has accomplished as many points of divergence and contrast. Therefore is there, in me, at least, an insistent whisper for ancestral and long denied rights. You will feel it in time—"

"How much you have thought about it!"

"My mind is pretty well oiled: it does not take me years to work out any proposition. To tell you the truth, I have never put that undercurrent of consciousness into words until to-night. All the same, even if I loved you, if I finally believed you to be the stronger of the two, I should take the next boat for England. California wouldn't hold me. And I should not say good-bye."

"That would be a confession of weakness."

"It is one I'd be the better for making."

"Well, anyhow, as I am hostess I can order you to bed. It must be one o'clock. I don't doubt you will find more than one affinity if you are awakening; that is merely the mating instinct. Good-night."

Far too hospitable and high-handed to incommode a guest, she did not tell him that Paula had gone, and that Stone had sauntered out in search of a "bracer," and had not returned. Gwynne slept the sleep of the unburdened conscience, and returned to Rosewater by the first train—Isabel was remaining in town for another day—ignorant not only of having violated the proprieties, but of the fact that a former inhabitant of Rosewater lived not far from the foot of the bluff.



XXV

TWO weeks later Lady Victoria was established in the house on Russian Hill. She had given no intimation of her coming until the day her train was due in Oakland, when she telegraphed, suddenly reflecting, no doubt, that she was descending into the wilderness and that precautions were wise. Gwynne barely had time to catch the train from Rosewater, and when the connecting boat arrived at the ferry building in San Francisco, he was obliged to run like a thief pursued by a policeman down to the Oakland ferry building, in order to catch the boat just starting to meet the Overland train. All this was by no means to his taste. Nor was his mother's cavalier arrival. It savored too much of royalty. And he had a masculine disapproval of being taken by surprise; moreover was far less ardent at the prospect of seeing his mother again than he would have expected. In England he had needed her; she seemed superfluous in this country, which she never would understand; and he wanted all his time for his studies—and as little reminder of England as possible. His mother, for all her individualities, was the concentrated essence of the England he knew best. Besides, she was accustomed to a great deal of attention. He had no taste for dancing attendance upon any one, and from whom else could she expect it—unless, to be sure—he recalled that his mother was a beautiful woman, always

surrounded by a court of admirers. Why should Americans be impervious to the accomplished fascination and the beauty of a woman that had reigned in London for thirty years? He determined to press Isabel into service. She could try her hand on his mother's American destinies, and provide her with amusement and a host of friends.

He felt all the promptings of natural affection when he was actually face to face with his mother once more, and forgot all his doubts in his intense amusement at her naïve surprise before the comfortable immensity of the San Francisco hotels, and the crowds and automobiles in the streets.

The next day he took her up to the ranch. For a week she stalked about the country, eight hours out of the twenty-four, expressing interest in nothing, although her eyes always softened at her son's approach; and if she manifested no enthusiasm for his adopted country, at least she barely mentioned the one of his heart. At the end of a week she promptly accepted Isabel's suggestion to transfer herself and her grim disgusted maid to the house on Russian Hill. Isabel lost no time in piloting her thither. Anne Montgomery undertook to provide her with a small staff of servants, and to call daily and order the household until all wheels were on their tracks. Mrs. Hofer delightedly agreed to be the social sponsor of Lady Victoria Gwynne, and issued invitations at once for a tea and a dinner; and Gwynne, who had been half indifferent to rebuilding on the San Francisco property, immediately began holding long interviews with bankers, lawyers, architects, and contractors. The law required him to give but thirty days' notice to his tenants, well-to-do workmen; and if all went well the building might be finished in seven

months. Lady Victoria evinced something like a renewed interest in life when told that by the following winter her income would be increased; and trebled as soon as the large revenue from the building had paid off the mortgage. Her son offered to place his own share at her disposal until her debts were paid, but to this she would not listen. He found her maternal affection undimmed, but other changes in her which he was far too masculine to understand, and after she was fairly settled and apparently content, he dismissed feminine idiosyncrasies from his overburdened mind. He had neglected his studies long enough, and it was time to begin his amateur practice in Judge Leslie's office, to say nothing of the bi-weekly lecture at the State University at Berkeley, which, with the journeys, consumed the day.

Isabel's feminine soul took a far more abiding interest in the subtle changes of that complicated modern evolution whose special arrangement of particles was labelled Victoria Gwynne. She bore little external traces of her illness, and when Isabel congratulated her upon so complete a recovery, she looked as blank as if memory had failed her. Isabel had encountered this truly British attitude before, and experienced none of the irritation of several of the Englishwoman's new acquaintances when insisting upon the beneficence of the San Francisco climate. But it was not long before Isabel discerned that under that sphinx-like exterior the older woman was intensely nervous, that once or twice even her splendid breeding could not control an outburst of irritability. Her eyes, too, had a curious hard opaque look, as if the old voluptuous fires had burned out; and she seemed ever on her guard. What her future plans were no man could guess. She

might have settled down for life on Russian Hill, so completely did she make the new environment fit her imperious person. She even remarked casually to Isabel that "of course" she should entertain in the course of the winter, but at one of the hotels; she would never ask people to climb those stairs on a possibly rainy night. But it was evident that her entertaining would be merely on the principle of noblesse oblige; her lack of interest in the doings of a civilization so different from her own was patent, and it was doubtful if she would have even accepted the attentions showered upon her had she not feared the alternative of an unbroken ennui. Isabel felt vaguely sorry for her, and puzzled deeply, but she could do no more than provide her with entertainment and the abundant comforts and luxuries of the city; to express any deeper and more womanly sympathy to that proud nature would have been a liberty Isabel would have been the last to take. But she retained her own rooms and went down with Gwynne once a week, when they both devoted themselves to Lady Victoria's amusement. It was at least gratifying that the French restaurants and many of the unique Bohemian resorts entertained her more than society; and she found the Stones amusing, and frankly made use of Paula, who did all her shopping, receiving many a careless present.

Meanwhile Gwynne, when not reading, or practising, or attending lectures, or endeavoring to hurry forward his new enterprise in the city, took long buggy rides with Tom Colton about the country, and made acquaintance with many farmers, as well as with the guileful depths of the ambitious young politician. Colton, although for the present dependent upon only the voters of his district,

by no means confined his attentions even to those of his county. The time would come when he would need a wide popularity, and with his cool far-sighted tactics he was already sowing its seeds. There was an immense and varied material to work on. Not only were his own county and the two adjoining as large as a State more modest than California, but, with the exception of the Asti vineyards, and one or two ranches like Lumalitas, were cut up into an infinite number of farms owned by Irish, Scotch, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Hungarians, Swiss, Germans, Italians, and a few native Americans. Asti alone, a great district devoted to the vine, and boasting the largest tank in the world, was entirely in the hands of Italians. The Swiss, for the most part, were cheese makers. The rest devoted themselves to chickens, grain, hay, wheat, and fruit. There were several orange orchards and one violet farm. Many of these foreigners were so numerous that churches had been built for their separate use, and service was held in their native tongue. All were willing to drop work for a few moments and talk politics with Colton, particularly if it was to abuse lawmakers and monopolists—above all, the railroads, whose prices were exorbitant, and whose service was inadequate. In this department of monopoly at least they had a real grievance, and Colton never let them forget it. He made no secret of the fact that the United States Senate was his goal, and reiterated that there alone could he accomplish the legislation that would free the farmer from the costly tyranny of the corporations and give the laboring man his rightful share of profit. Some were skeptical that any mortal could accomplish all he promised, but the foreigners for the most part were gullible, and they all liked the rich

man's son, with his simple ways and his blatant democracy.

Of Gwynne they took little notice, but he studied them, one and all, and it was not long before he understood the materials with which he must deal in the future. The State was Republican, although San Francisco presented the remarkable spectacle of a Democratic mayor with a Republican boss controlling the labor element, which was presumably democratic in essence, and devoted to the figurehead. But country politics were far less complicated, and it was possible that a strong Democrat with a sufficiency of inherent power could weld together the conflicting and half indifferent elements, and change the political current. Californians had gone thunderously Republican at the last Presidential election, because for the moment they were dazzled by the Roosevelt star and all it seemed to portend. There could be no better augury for a really great and sincere leader; for whether or not Roosevelt was all they imagined, the point to consider was that they had been carried away by their higher enthusiasms, not by those a mere trickster like Colton was trying to stimulate. They had rushed to the polls with all that was best in their natures in the ascendant, eager not only for a great servant that would reform many abuses, but for one that stood at the moment before the country as the embodiment of all that was high-minded, uncompromisingly honest, and nobly patriotic in American life. It was one of the greatest personal triumphs ever accomplished—for the leaders wished nothing more ardently than his downfall—and whether or not it was to be justified by history, it must ever remain to his credit that he had hypnotized his countrymen through the higher channels

of their nature. The reaction might be bitter, but memory is short, and at least he had served to demonstrate that the American mind was not materialized by the lust of gain, was quite as susceptible to the loftier patriotic promptings as in the days of its revolutionary and simpler ancestors. A man like Colton might delude for a time, for the Democratic party was deplorably weak in leaders, and the Republican bosses, in California, as elsewhere, had made the State a byword for shameless corruption; and their iron heel ground hard even in that land of climate and plenty. Colton might be useful to rouse Californians to a sense of their wrongs and opportunities, but Gwynne doubted if he could hold them. He promised too much. The time would come when they would turn to a strong man who talked less and did more, who gradually imbued them with the conviction of absolute honesty, distinguished ability, and as much disinterestedness as it is reasonable to expect of any mortal striving for the great prizes of life.

One day there was a mass-meeting suddenly called to express sympathy with the orange growers of the South, who had dumped twelve carloads of early oranges into the San Francisco Bay rather than submit to the increased rates of the transcontinental railroads. Gwynne saw his opportunity and summoned his powers. There was a moment of doubt, of hesitancy, of reflection that he was rusty, and that the subject was of no special interest to him; then, at the eager insistence of Colton, he walked rapidly to the front of the platform with all the actor's exalted nervous delight in a new rôle. In a few moments there was no subject on earth so interesting to him as the iniquities of the railroads and the wrongs of the orange growers; he awoke from his torpor so triumphantly that

his amazed audience, as of old, felt the deep flattery of its power over him, and he made a speech which was like the rushing of risen waters through a broken dam. Not that he permitted himself to be carried away wholly; he deliberately refrained from indiscriminate phillipics, from rousing their ire too far, grasped the opportunity to see what could be done by appealing to their reason through their higher emotions, and begged them to meet constantly and consider the question of electing men that were not mere politicians, that would deliver the State from the medieval tyranny that oppressed it; advised his hearers to employ the best legal counsel they could get, and to give their leisure moments to the study of practical politics, instead of indolently submitting all great questions to the hands of men as unscrupulous as the State bosses and corporations. With his peculiar gift he made each breathless man in the auditorium feel not only that he was being personally addressed, but that his mental equipment had mysteriously been raised to the plane of the speaker's. When Gwynne finished amid applause as great as any he had evoked in England after the expounding of great issues dear to his heart, he turned to find Colton regarding him with sharp eyes and lowering brow. He immediately took his arm and led him without.

"I am glad a climax has come so soon," he said. "Otherwise I should have begun to feel like a hypocrite. Not only are your principles and mine utterly antagonistic, but you must consider me as your rival. I can do nothing definite, of course, for nearly four years, and meanwhile you may reach the United States Senate. If you do I shall do my utmost to oust you. Nevertheless, if I can be of any service in sending you there I am perfectly willing to

place myself at your disposal, for the experience and insight I shall acquire in exchange. And as you are no worse than the others, and some one must go, it might as well be you as another. But, I repeat, I shall use all my powers to oust you and take your place."

Colton stood for a few moments, his hands in his pockets, regarding the ground. Then he lifted his eyes and smiled ingenuously.

"You are dead straight, for a fact. And I think I have got just as good an opinion of myself as you have of yourself. You put me in the United States Senate with that tongue of yours—God, you can talk!—and I'll take the chances of even you getting me out. It will take more than eloquence to upset a great State machine, and before I get through I'll have the Democratic machine stronger than the Republican is to-day. You can't get anywhere in this country without the machine, and the man in control stays in control unless he falls down, and this I don't propose to do. I'll swap frankness and tell you right here that when I'm boss I may let you come to Congress as my colleague, but that you've got to do as I say when you get there. What do you say to that?"

"I'll take all the chances. At least we understand each other. I work for you now, and I break the power of both you and your infernal machine when I am a citizen of the United States."

"Shake," said Colton.

And they shook.

XXVI

ISABEL sat idly on the veranda of her old hotel as was her habit in the evening hour. There had been no heavy rains as yet to freshen the hills and swell the tides until the salt waters scalded the juices from the marsh grass, turning it from green to bronze and red; and the barometer was stationary. A cool wind came in from the sea with the flood, and Isabel enjoyed the beauty that was hers all the more luxuriously in her thick shawl of white wool. A great part of the valley north and south was within the range of her vision, and it was suffused with gold under a sky that looked like an inverted crucible pouring down its treasures in the prodigal fashion of the land. Facing her house and on the opposite side of the marsh, at its widest here, was a high wall of rock, from which the valley curved backward on either side, tapering to the great level in the north, but on the south halting abruptly before the mass of mountains following the coast line and topped by the angular shoulder of Tamalpais; coal black to-night against the intense gold of the West.

She had not seen Gwynne for several days, and half expected that he would come to-night. These were busy days, and she saw less of him than formerly, although he snatched an hour for shooting whenever he could, and occasionally rode over for supper; and they saw much of each other during the weekly visit to the city. Their

relations were easy and sexless. He refused to talk of chickens, but they had many other interests in common. She had by no means forgotten his outbreak in the launch, and had scowled at her arms for quite a week as she brushed her hair for bed, but that episode was now several weeks old, and she had ceased to harbor resentment. But she was subtly out of conceit with herself and life, resentful that she missed any one, after her long triumph in freedom from human ties; also resentful of the respect and interest with which Gwynne had inspired her, particularly since his summary expulsion of her will from the battle ground where it was becoming accustomed to easy triumphs. She had no love for him, and she was as satisfied with the life she had chosen as ever, but she was beginning to feel a sense of approaching confusion, where readjustment would once more be necessary. The future looked longer, and she was losing her pleasant sense of finality. She had guessed long ago that the only chance of escaping the terrible restlessness that pursues so many women, like enemies in the unseen world converted into furies, was to caress and hug the present, fool the ego into the belief that it wanted nothing beyond an imminent future, certain of realization, which should be as all-possessing as the present. But she had been wise enough to do little analysis, either of her depths or of life, and her time was full enough.

"Are you asleep?" asked a polite voice. Gwynne swung himself over the low railing of the veranda.

"I did not hear your horse." It would be long before he could surprise her into any sort of emotion again.

"Good reason. I walked. I read Cooley until I had an alarming vision of the Constitution of the United

States writ black upon the sunset, so I thought it was high time to walk it off. Naturally my footsteps led me here."

"That was nice of them. Mac will drive you home, or you can have my horse."

"It is like you to plan my departure before I have fairly arrived. May I sit down?"

Isabel shivered. The glow had gone, there was only the intense dark fiery blue behind the stars—silver and crystal and green; one rarely sees a golden star in California. There were scattered lights in Rosewater and on the hillsides; and the night boat winding through the marsh was a mere chain of colored lights; here and there a lamp on a head mast looked like a fallen star.

"That is the way I generally feel after the glow has disappeared," said Gwynne, abruptly. "Let us go in."

There were blazing logs on the hearth, and a comfortable chair on either side. The room looked very red and warm and seductive. As they passed the table Isabel half lifted one of the English Reviews for which she subscribed. "There is an allusion to you here," she said. "I meant to send it to you. I fancy they want you back. It is very complimentary."

But Gwynne concealed the promptings of vanity and took one of the chairs at the fireside, asking permission to light his pipe. She noted, as she settled herself opposite, that there was less of repose in his long figure than formerly, something of repressed activity, and his rather heavy eyes were colder and more alert.

"It all seems a thousand years ago," he said. "I am John Gwynne. I doubt if I shall ever love your California, but I am interested—this mass of typical Europeans not yet Americanized—no common brain to work on, no



one set of racial peculiarities. And the law has me fast. I have become frightfully ambitious. Talk about your Hamilton. I too walk the floor till the small hours, repeating pages aloud. My Jap thinks me mad, and no doubt is only induced to remain at his post by the excellence of my tobacco, and the fact that his education is unhindered by much service. While I am packing my own brain cells I infer that he is attending a night school in St. Peter, for I hear him returning at all hours; and he certainly shows no trace of other dissipation. We have never exchanged ten sentences, but perhaps we act as a mutual stimulus."

"Don't you love California the least little bit?" asked Isabel, wistfully. "Or San Francisco?"

"I have liked San Francisco too well upon several occasions—when I have run down to spend the night at the Hofers—or have fallen in with Stone on my way back from Berkeley, and been induced to stay over. Hofer and that set seem to be content with living well; they are too serious for dissipation. But Stone! Of course such men die young, but they are useful in exciting the mind to wonder and awe. I don't think I am in any danger of becoming San Franciscan to the point of feeding her insatiable furnaces with all the fires of my being, but there is no denying her fascination, and it has given me a very considerable pleasure to yield to it. Whether I shall practise law there—change my base—I have not yet had time to think it out."

"A country lawyer's is certainly no career."

"This is a good place to begin politically. San Francisco is too hard a nut to crack at present. If I could become powerful in the State, the Independent leader they

need, then I might transfer my attentions to that unhappy town. Even Hofer and all the rest of the devoted band seem to be practically helpless since the re-election of the mayor. What could I do—at present?"

"With a big legal reputation made in San Francisco you could travel very fast and far. And you would be learning every thread of every rope, become what is technically known as 'on'; and then when the time came—"

"I hate so much waiting! The shortest cut is here in the country. I shall manage these men far better than Colton, who is the crudest type of American politician. Nothing could be simpler than his program: abuse, promise. Nothing simpler than his ambition: all for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. I have yet to hear him utter a sentiment that betrays any love of his country or desire to serve her, any real public spirit. Those are the sentiments I am trying to cultivate for this accidental land of my birth, for without them ambition is inexcusable and endeavor a hollow sham."

"And can't you?" Isabel left her chair and stood by the mantel-piece. It was the first time he had spoken of himself with any approach to confidence since the day of his arrival. "Sometimes I repent the share I had in your coming to America—not that I flatter myself I had much to do with it—" she added, hastily. "But my being there may have turned the scale. You might have gone off to rule a South American Republic—"

"I should have done nothing so asinine, and you had everything to do with my coming here. Not that I hold you responsible. You gave a hint, and I took it."

"And you don't regret it?"

"Why waste time in regret? I can go back any mo-

ment. Not that I have the least intention of doing anything of the sort."

He was pleasantly tired in mind and body, and the warm homelike room caressed his senses. He settled himself more deeply in Hiram Otis's old chair and looked up at Isabel. She had laid aside the white shawl, but wore a red Indian scarf over her black gown. The gown was cut out in a square at the neck; she always dressed for her lonely supper, and she had put a red rose in her hair, in the fashion of her California grandmothers. With her face turned from the light, her eyes with their large pupils looked black.

"I shall stay in California, like or no like," continued Gwynne. "But I did not walk five miles to talk politics with a woman after a day of law and the citizens of Rosewater. Where did you get that curious old-fashioned scarf?"

"I found it in a trunk of my mother's. Doutbless it belonged to her mother. I also found this." She indicated a fine gold chain and heart of garnets that lay on her white neck. The humor in his eyes had quickened into admiration; he reflected that the various streams in her composition might not be so completely blended as would appear upon that normally placid surface. The feeling of uneasiness which he had peremptorily dismissed stole over him once more. She looked wholly Spanish, and put out the light of every brunette he knew. Dolly Boutts, whom he still admired at a distance, although he fled at her approach, was a bouncing peasant by contrast; and several well-bred and entertaining young women of the same warm hues that he had met during the past few weeks in San Francisco suddenly seemed to be the merest

climatic accidents beside this girl who unrolled the pages of California's older past and afforded him a fleeting vision of those lovely doñas and fiery caballeros for whom life was an eternal playground. That they were his progenitors as well as hers he found it difficult to realize, he seemed to have inherited so little of them; but they had flown generously to Isabel's making, and to-night she gave him that same impression of historic background as when she turned the severity of her profile up on him and suggested a doughtier race.

"It was about the same time," he said, abruptly.

"What?"

"While our Spanish ancestors were playing at this end of the continent, our 'American' forefathers were bracing themselves against England. It was in 1776 that the Presidio and Mission of San Francisco were founded, was it not? Curious coincidence. Perhaps that is what gives you your sense of destiny."

"I have no sense of destiny."

"Oh, but you have. Now I know that you are quite Spanish to-night. It is your more ordinary mood of calm unvarnished—not to say brutal—directness that gives you your greatest charm as a comrade—even while you repel as a woman."

"Do I repel as a woman?" Isabel had placed one foot on the fender, one hand on the mantel-piece, and as she leaned slightly towards him, the red glow of the lamps and the mellow old scarf softening her features, the small square of neck dazzlingly white, and the position revealing the lines of her figure against the high flames of the logs, she looked more lovely than he had ever seen her. Like all racial beauties, bred by selection, she needed the arts

of dress and furnishings to frame her. It is only your accidental or peasant beauty that can defy "clothes"; and Isabel's looks in ordinary ranch and riding costumes made no impression on Gwynne whatever. But to-night her appeal was very direct, although he had not the least idea whether she was posing or was entirely natural in an unusual mood. He had no intention of being made a fool of, however, and answered with the responsive glow in his eyes due a pretty and charming woman:

"Sometimes. Not to-night. If you would remain Spanish with no Revolutionary lapses, I make no doubt I should fall in love with you, and then perhaps you would fall in love with me merely because of my own lack of picturesqueness, and we should live happily ever after."

"What a bore." Isabel sniffed, and moved her gaze to the fire. But she did not alter her attitude.

"Are you really happy?" asked Gwynne, curiously.

"Of course. So much so that it begins to worry me a little. My puritanical instincts dictate that I have no right to be quite happy. What slaves we are to the old poisons in our blood! I live by the light of my reason, and all is well until one of those mouldy instincts, like a buried disease germ, raps all round its tomb. Then I feel nothing but a graveyard of all my ancestors. I don't let them out, and my reason continues its rule, but they keep me from being—well—entirely happy, and I resent that."

"I should say it was not the Puritans but your common womanly instincts that were thumping round their cells. You have no right to be happy except as Nature intended when she deliberately equipped you, and that is in making some man happy."

"That is one of those superstitions I am trying to live down while I am still young. Your mother is unhappy, under all her pride, because she has outlived youth and beauty and all they meant to her—she made them her gods, and now they have gone, and she doesn't know which way to turn. Ennui devours her, and she is too old to turn her brains to account, too cynical for the average resource of religion, and too steeped, dyed, solidified, in one kind of womanism to turn at this late date to any other. But there are so many resources for the woman of to-day. The poor despised pioneers have done that for us. Of course it has not killed our natural instincts, and if I had not fallen in love when I did, no doubt I should still be looking about for an opportunity. It is my good-fortune that I was delivered so soon. I wish all women born to enjoy life in its variety could be freed of that terrible burden of sex as early as I was."

"I suppose you would like to rid men of it too."

"I do not waste any thought on men; so far as I have observed they are able to take care of themselves."

"A woman incapable of passion is neither more nor less than a failure."

"I have seen so many commonplace women capable of it! Look at Mrs. Haight and Paula."

"I never look at Mrs. Haight, but as for Mrs. Stone I can quite conceive that if she had better taste she would be almost charming. She embodies youth properly equipped."

"For reproduction, you mean. That is the reason that the silliest, the meanest, the most poisonous girl can always find a husband if she is healthy. It is no wonder that some of us want a new standard."

Gwynne laughed. "Schopenhauer suits you better when you are out on the marsh in rubber boots and a shooting-jacket. Do you realize that if you persist in this determination to camp permanently in the outer—and frigid—zone, you will never be the centre of a life drama? That, I take it, is what every woman desires most. You had a sort of curtain-raiser—to my mind, hardly that. First love is merely the more picturesque successor of measles and whooping-cough. In marriage it may develop into something worth while, but in itself amounts to nothing—except as material for poets. But the real drama—that is in the permanent relation. This relation is the motive power of the great known dramas of the world. Life is packed with little unheard of dramas of precisely the same sort—the eternal duet of sex; nothing else keeps it going. Now, it is positive that a woman cannot have a drama all by herself—"

"Not a drama in the old style. But that is what we are trying to avoid. Are there not other faculties? What has civilization done for the world if it is to be everlastingly sex-ridden? What is the meaning of this multitude of faculties that progress has developed? What is the meaning of life itself—"

"Oh, are you aiming to read the riddle of life?"

"I mean to pass my own life in the effort. Men have failed. It is our turn. But if I say any more I suppose you will pinch me again."

"No," said Gwynne, smiling. "I feel much more like kissing you—ah!"

He had the satisfaction of seeing her eyes blaze. His pipe was finished; he clasped his hands behind his head and almost lay down in his deep chair. "I am just tired enough

to be completely happy, and if I can look at you I am willing to listen like a lamb all night."

"And be convinced of nothing." Isabel tossed her head and returned to her chair. It faced him and he could still look at her. They watched each other from opposite sides of the hearth with something of the unblinking wariness of a dog and a cat, and no doubt had they possessed caudal appendages they would have lashed them slowly.

"I don't say that," he replied, in a moment. "I believe I intimated that I came here to-night with a purpose. It was to tell you that I have thought more or less about what you said in the boat that morning, and that I can understand, if I cannot agree with you. No doubt the times have bred a certain class of women too good for mere matrimony. I have seen many that were miserably thrown away; although I will confess that the only remedy that occurred to me was a better man. But if you and your like—are there really any others?—if you, let us say, are groping towards some new solution of life, some happiness recipe that will benefit the few that deserve it, far be it from a mere man to—well—pinch you. You—you individually—have so many highly developed faculties that I can conceive your finding sufficient occupation through them, a filling up of time;—and no doubt idleness and the vain groping after sex happiness are the principal reasons for the failure of so many women. But work does not give happiness; it merely diminishes the capacity and opportunities for unhappiness. I take it that you, with all your gifts and the immense amount of thought you have bestowed on the subject, are striving for something higher than that. Besides, I had your lucid expo-

sition of your mission. I now have an additional reason for remaining in California—to watch the new century plant flower. Like other commonplace mortals, however, my instincts fight for the only solution of happiness I know anything about. I still think that as the wife of some ambitious public man you would find a far better market for your gifts than to stand as a sort of statue of Independence on the top of Russian Hill with only San Francisco to admire. And if you passionately loved the man—"

"Now you are spoiling everything. But it is handsome of you to admit that I am not a fool; and that you have thought my theories worth turning over in your busy mind is a compliment I duly appreciate."

"Even a sneer cannot spoil your loveliness to-night, so I don't mind the sarcasm in the least. But it is true that in my few unoccupied intervals—as, for instance, when Imura Kisaburo Hinamoto is shaving me, and I have, by an excess of politeness, made sure that he will not cut my throat—I have had visions of you on that ungainly pedestal with all San Francisco kneeling at the base. It is quite conceivable. I am a born leader myself. I recognize certain attributes in you. The town is on the qui vive to know you. Mrs. Hofer is determined that you shall be the sensation of her ball, and no doubt that will be the commencement of your illustrious career. When you are really grown into your pedestal like one of Rodin's statues, you are certain to have a most illustrious and distinctive career—and accomplish much good. But you will be terribly lonely."

"I should not have time. And if I am a born leader, how, pray, could I yoke comfortably with any man? I

should despise a slave, and the same roof will not shelter two leaders."

"I am not so sure of that, if both were working to the same end. It takes two halves to make a whole. If women have so far been the subordinate sex, no doubt it is merely the result of those physical disabilities which enabled man to gain the ascendency during the long centuries of struggle with nature. But your sex is rapidly altering all that. We shall see woman's suffrage in our time—and be better for it. I have never been opposed to it—and that is proof enough of the progress the idea has made, for I am arbitrary and masculine enough. Then—now, no doubt—women will be as much partners as wives, and I grant the relationship might be vastly more interesting than marriage in the old style. And I will even concede that it may be the only sort of marriage for a man of my type—with a pretty woman, of course; hanged if I could marry the finest woman in the world if she were ugly; and if this be true—if men really need women enough to make such a concession as I am making this moment, then I fancy that women will retain enough of their original generosity to meet our demands."

"You do not need any woman. In England I fancied that your mother meant a great deal to you, but I don't believe you have missed her at all—or that you will mourn when she returns to England. I was more than ready to take her place; you actually stirred my maternal instincts when you arrived, you looked so forlorn. But you spurned me, and now you have grown too independent even to illustrate your own theories."

"I did not spurn you. Some day I may tell you why I did not come to you in my dark hours, but not now."

"Why not now?"

"Because I do not choose to. And seductive as you look I am not to be made a fool of to gratify one of your whims—of which you are quite as full as the least emancipated woman I ever saw."

To this Isabel deigned no reply, and a silence ensued. She transferred her gaze to the fire, and her mind revolved in search of new arguments, but it was tired and worked slowly. She concluded to change the subject and offer to read him the article in the Review, so complimentary to himself; but she turned her head to discover that he was sound asleep.

She laughed, half vexed, half amused. Then she laid a rug lightly over his knees, and softly replenished the fire. The room was deliciously warm, her own chair very comfortable. She too fell asleep.

She was rudely awakened. Gwynne was shaking her by the shoulder, and his face was white with consternation.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Do you know what time it is? It is two o'clock! Why did you let me sleep? Those old tabbies—"

"They must be asleep too," said Isabel, indifferently. "Come out, and I will hold the lantern while you saddle Kaiser."

XXVII

MRS. HAIGHT was hastily putting her parlor in order for the "Ten o'Clock Five Hundred Club." She was without a servant, having had four hired girls and three Japs in the past month; during the last three days she had cooked for herself and Mr. Haight, "done all the work," and attended seven card parties. Mr. Haight, who had not had his dinner the night before until nine o'clock, and whose steak this morning had been burned and his coffee muddy, had gone down-town in a huff, threatening to move to the hotel unless his wife found a servant or her sanity.

Mrs. Haight, who wore a red flannel wrapper trimmed with black lace, which she believed became her style, shook up the sofa-cushions on the divan, where she longed to receive her guests reclining in Oriental voluptuousness, but had never dared, and dusted the table as if she were slapping an enemy's face. The bed was not made, nor likely to be before night, and she too knew the penalties of burned steak and bad coffee, enhanced by the irritability of the insomniac. She had her redeeming virtues, no doubt; all have, even burglars and murderers, until they slip into the region of pathology; but this morning she looked and felt like a she-wolf; and few mammals are so dangerous, particularly a she-wolf that has never suckled young.

Her expected guests arrived promptly, glowing with the light dry cold, some wearing furs because they became the season, others thin cloth jackets over their shirt-waists. One had bundled herself into a broché shawl and "run over" hatless. Each, as she entered the parlor, cast a critical eye upon the silver spoon standing in lonely glory on the mantel-piece, and nodded or scowled, according to her bent. Mrs. Haight was far too cunning to detain them from the tables they fairly rushed at as the last member arrived, and it was not until they had "scrapped" and wrestled and stormed at and abused each other for at least two hours, not until their ugly passions were in full possession, and they threw down their cards with loud indignation that a substitute should be allowed "to compete for a prize, anyhow"—the substitute having won the spoon—that the hostess, with the peculiar slow fire in her eyes that marks the beast of prey in sight of its quarry, suddenly let it be understood that the high tension was to be relieved with a choice bit of scandal. It was some time since they had had one; propriety, like business honesty, being almost inevitable in a community little larger than a throne.

Mrs. Wheaton exclaimed: "Your eyes look like two burnt holes in a blanket, Minerva. What is it? Hurry up. I must run home and supervise a new Swede that speaks ten words of English. She asked me if I wanted young children for dinner. I suppose she meant chickens, but one never knows, and Anabel's babies are just over the fence."

"It's this, and it's no joking matter, Sarah Wheaton. I saw Mr. Gwynne pass this house at three o'clock this morning, and on Isabel Otis's horse. Now, I saw him

going out to Old Inn, *walking* before sundown. He had plenty of time to say what he had to say and get home at a decent hour—which is long before half-past ten, and that's what it's been many a night. This thing has become a scandal to the community, and I for one won't stand it any longer. Its downright immoral, and I'm not using too strong language purposely."

"Oh my!" exclaimed Dolly Boutts. "You could never make me believe anything against Isabel. He's studying terribly hard—the judge told pa—and likely as not has insomnia. Englishmen are so terribly dull to talk to I shouldn't wonder if it was hard work for them to learn anything."

"Insomnia!" cried Mrs. Haight. "I guess I have insomnia and I guess I know what I am talking about. What does a kid like you know of the wickedness of the world, or insomnia either? But this has gone just as far as *I* intend to permit it."

"It certainly looks very bad, very bad," muttered Mrs. Wheaton, whose own light eyes were glowing. "What steps shall you take, Minerva? Or what should you advise me to do? I am sorry I had forgotten the girl. I should have kept the eye on her that I intended."

"It's a matter for all, not for any one of us. I intend to bring it up at the Club Meeting this afternoon, and I expect you all to back me, for the thing's a disgrace to the community, and all our girls will be talked about. In my opinion the best thing to do is to tell her to leave and go and live in that hot-bed of wickedness, San Francisco."

"Why Minerva, you're a regular old Puritan witch-hunter!" exclaimed Mrs. Colton. "You never could make me believe that child had any harm in her—"

"It isn't what one believes. It's what is. I know. I've studied human nature. If I don't know anything else I know that. She'll get out of Rosewater, or I'll hit her in her weak spot. I'll write her up for the San Francisco *Illuminator*. They'd give hundreds, and they can have it for nothing—"

"Why, Minerva Haight, I'm ashamed of you!" cried Mrs. Colton. "It's like persecution, and you have no proof. Why should you know more of the world than we do, I'd like to know?"

"I do, that's all. And I don't see her doing every mortal thing she wants, while others have to walk a chalked line through life. It's all or none. That's my creed. She'll soon wilt when she sees we mean business—either go, or take a chaperon, or marry the man, whichever she prefers. I don't care, so long as she ain't allowed to do as she pleases and no questions asked and no penalty paid. But she'll knuckle, for it's my opinion she's just making money to spend it in San Francisco—cut a dash there like her mother did before her. Probably wants to become a society leader and have a string of lovers. Nice product to hail from Rosewater. I think she ought to be sent back to Europe where they don't mind such goings on. The things you do read about the English aristocracy! It's my opinion *that* Lady Victoria ain't any better than she should be. She looks it—and through us, just as if we were window-panes."

"You are real crude, Minerva," said Mrs. Colton, crushingly, as she rose to go. "I thought Rosewater was near enough to the metropolis for us not to be as provincial as some folks farther up the line, who haven't the same advantages."

"I guess we're all crude enough, if it comes to that," retorted Mrs. Haight. "I'd like to know what's cruder than a man's staying at a girl's house till two o'clock in the morning—and for all the high and mighty way he carries himself—and him the born image of Hi Otis. It's too ridiculous. I'd like to bring him down several pegs, too."

"He bears only the most distant resemblance to Hi Otis," said Mrs. Colton, indignantly. "I never could endure Hi; he didn't have the manners of a car-conductor, and this young man's real polite and kind, besides having a *much* more high-toned face. I don't believe you can run him out, either. He looks the kind to stay or go, just as suits him. And I'd advise you to think this matter over before you give it publicity. I might go out and speak to Isabel quietly—"

"Not much she don't get off as easy as that!"

Mrs. Wheaton nodded approvingly. "It's a case for the Club," said she. "We'll talk it out this afternoon and decide what's best to do."

And all the others, save Mrs. Colton and the loyal Dolly, cordially agreed with her.



XXVIII

THE Rosewater Literary, Political, and Improvement Club met on the first and fourth Thursdays of the month, in a large room on the top floor of the Town Hall, and across the corridor from the Public Library. Saving only the business section of Rosewater, rejuvenated by the fruitful Leghorn, there was no such centre of activity within forty miles. Rosewater, once as disreputable as San Francisco in the Fifties, now contributed but an occasional drunkard or burglar to the languid powers on the first floor of the Town Hall. The reading public was largely confined to young girls with the taste for romance fresh on the palate. The new books wandered in a year after the rest of the world had forgotten them, and rarely in couples. One copy was quite able to quench the thirst for "keeping up," and was often read aloud in the intervals between cards. The standard works were well represented, however, and a reasonable amount of history. "All Rosewater's good for," quoth one of the biting wits of St. Peter, "is to die in. If you're born there people never forget it; it sticks to you like a strawberry mark on the end of your nose. And if you live there you might as well be dead, anyhow." Rosewater retorted that if St. Peter had a better library it was because she had nothing else to do than read, and, for all its court-house, was

nothing but a suburb of Rosewater, anyway; or at the best a mere headquarters for drummers.

On the afternoon following Mrs. Haight's card-party the large sunny room with its outlook upon marsh and hill was filled promptly at two o'clock; for the word had flown about town that Minerva Haight was on the war-path and that the scalp she pursued was Isabel Otis's. The President, as she rapped for order, betrayed no ruffling of the humorous imperturbability that had made her a power in Rosewater. Mrs. Leslie, although of "the old Southern set" of San Francisco, had none of the external elegances of Mrs. Wheaton, Mrs. Boutts and Dolly, or even of her own daughter. She was generally to be seen in a rusty black frock and bonnet, a pair of eye-glasses in black frames bestriding the bridge of her nose. But her eyes were very black and bright, her mouth was as firm as it was kind and humorous. Beside her sat the Treasurer, Mrs. Wheaton, whom Mrs. Leslie understood as thoroughly as she did every member of the flock that was really hers, although in matters of mere society she disdained to lead it. Mrs. Wheaton, for all her petty airs and evil-scenting profile, was really a woman of high ideals. Her severity to others was due to the secret knowledge that these ideals were beyond her personal accomplishment, and the satisfaction to be derived from audibly rating the failings of her neighbors. Her highest ideal was self-control, particularly in relation to the weaknesses of the flesh; but after a period of stern abstinence, she indulged inordinately in oysters, fried chicken with cream gravy, and ice-cream with cocoanut cake; and sipped a night-cap upon retiring. Her passion for cards had long since routed her will; but she intended to reform wholly in time, for she walked in

fear of the Lord. If she judged the young harshly, she persuaded herself that she had only their well-being at heart. She was one of the pillars of the church and gave liberally to its support.

Mrs. Haight, who, as we have seen, enjoyed one of those purely fortuitous reputations for cleverness, was Secretary of the combined wings of the Club, and sat on Mrs. Leslie's left. Mrs. Wheaton's portly person was sheathed in purple velvet, and there were handsome strings between two of her chins, but Mrs. Haight wore a battered hat of Neapolitan straw bedecked with a ragged bunch of carnations. It sat on one side of her ill-kept head, giving her a singularly rakish and definite appearance. She was furthermore attired in an old Paisley shawl belonging to her grandmother—what better way to advertise a grandmother?—over a blue alpaca frock made by her own unskilful fingers. Mr. Haight was the most prosperous druggist in Rosewater, but his wife had sounding virtues.

The other members of the Club, some sixty in number, were as variously dressed as became their pockets or proclivities, decently for the most part, for there was no poverty in Rosewater. Mrs. Leslie took no notice of the charged atmosphere, but proceeded to business as methodically as if engaged in her morning housekeeping. The minutes of the last meeting were read by Mrs. Haight, in the cultivated tones of one who had recited upon the stage of her youth, "Curfew shall not ring to-night," and "The Wreck of the Hesperus." The huskily strident voice trembled slightly, but she read several pages of foolscap without a break, and finished with a flourish. Then Mrs. Leslie, in spite of scraping chairs, asked Mrs. Colton, Chairman of the Improvement Inspection Com-

mittee to read her report on the condition of the new concrete pavements, of several homesick palm-trees in the public squares, and on the prospect of removing tin cans and soda-water bottles from the picnic grounds. This resort was near the marsh, and it was the pet project of the ladies of Rosewater to extend it into a boulevard as far as Point Santiago, so that "public picnickers" should find an additional reason for spending their money in Rosewater, and extend the fame of the town. They had endeavored to extract the funds from their stingy lords by private subscription, failing an appeal to the City Fathers, who found other uses for the public funds; but even the civic Mr. Boutts was not ready for such an outlay. The women—who had accomplished so much, having literally transformed Rosewater from a broken-down pioneer country town into one of the prettiest spots in California—had by no means despaired; and when Mrs. Colton finished her report, Mrs. Leslie remarked:

"Our boulevard may be nearer than you think. Mr. Gwynne has conceived a project for reclaiming the marsh-lands, and converting them, by means of levees and those tremendous dredges and pumps, into arable land—like the reclaimed islands of the San Joaquin River; and has persuaded Tom Colton to present a bill to that effect at the next meeting of the legislature—asking for an appropriation for the levees, at least. He has himself promised a handsome contribution for the boulevard, convinced that it will add materially to the wealth and importance of the town. He has even talked over Mr. Boutts—an important conversion"—nodding smilingly at Mrs. Boutts—"and Isabel Otis, who has forty-five acres of marsh, has promised that if the bill goes through she will also con-

tribute a thousand dollars. She not only realized at once that the boulevard would bring more capital to Rosewater, but she means to sow the reclaimed land with asparagus —and we all know the profit in that. Her attitude and comprehension of the matter have gratified me extremely, almost as much as her continued residence in Rosewater after all her fine experiences abroad; to say nothing of engaging personally in a lucrative business instead of playing with it and leaving the actual work to dishonest help. She is an example I wish more of our young women would follow. But as regards Mr. Gwynne: I think he deserves a vote of thanks. He comes here a total stranger with an immense estate, from which he could derive a sufficient income for his pleasures, and he has already devoted a considerable amount of his time and splendid mental abilities to the welfare of this little town. A few of our older men have some public spirit, an idea or two beyond lining their pockets, but we do not boast a single young man who cares whether we have camellias or cabbages in the public squares. I feel sure that Mr. Gwynne will supply this deficiency and be a host in himself. I have talked with him several times, and he has said, in so many words, that as he intends to make this county his home he purposes to accomplish something in the way of general improvement. This means that he will, for my husband says that he not only has remarkable mind and will, but that he is a young man of incorruptible honor—and I know of no combination that we need more. So, ladies, I propose that we pass a vote of thanks to Mr. Gwynne, thus not only showing our appreciation of his interest, but securing his friendship for the Club."

Mrs. Haight rose, sallow and trembling. She felt her sails flapping about her, but none the less was she determined to reach her goal if she had to get out and swim. She knew the President well enough to control the hissing of her venom, but as she turned to address the chair she found it impossible to imbue her tones with the suavity proper in a baleful counsel for the prosecution.

"Mrs. President, Ladies!" she began, clearing her throat. "Before passing a vote of thanks to Mr. Gwynne I think it my duty to ask you dispassionately if you really think he is a person from whom we can afford to receive favors. And above all, if Isabel Otis should be permitted any sort of contact with the Club she has scornfully refused to join. That is not the point, however. The point is that I maintain that neither of them is fit for respectable people to associate with." She felt that her summary was precipitate, and drawing herself up defiantly looked hard at Mrs. Leslie. The President was regarding her impassively.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because! As you force me to say it, Mr. Gwynne is out at Old Inn until all hours of the night. I have seen him riding home as late as half-past ten again and again. And I happen to know that before *that* Lady Victoria came, they were practically alone in the house on Russian Hill one whole night. Mrs. Filkins, as you know, lives on Taylor Street, and she saw Paula Stone pass her house in the afternoon looking as mad as a hornet—she was sure she wasn't going back, and found out afterwards that she hadn't; and she saw Mr. Gwynne come down those steps at seven o'clock the next morning—going to catch the seven-thirty boat—looking as pleased with himself as

Punch. But I might have stood all that for a while yet; I might have given Isabel the benefit of the doubt, since she had *asked* Paula to chaperon her, and might have found out too late that she had gone—for she was gallivanting herself all day; I might have overlooked his staying so often till ten-thirty—although I maintain that an unmarried girl living alone on a ranch without even female help is a disgrace to any community—yes, I might have swallowed that for a while longer; but this morning—at three o'clock—I saw—*with my own eyes, ladies*—Mr. Gwynne riding home from Old Inn on Isabel Otis's sorrel horse Kaiser. Now I, for one, don't stand for such goings on. I propose that instead of passing a vote of thanks to Mr. Gwynne we pass a resolution to *cut* both of them, and show them what a decent community is."

She sat down in her flounces, and Mrs. Wheaton rose and seconded the motion. The others looked rather frightened, although alert and interested, and Mrs. Colton rose hastily and proposed that before putting such a momentous question to the vote, the whole matter should be thoroughly investigated.

"We must also have the advice of our President," she added. "For my part, although I do not approve of young unmarried women living alone, still I cannot believe such dreadful things of anybody, let alone Isabel Otis. I am glad Anabel is not here. She would never listen to any insinuation against Isabel, and might be tempted to disrespect of her elders."

"And you, Mrs. Boutts?" asked the President.

"As a woman of the world I have not that implicit faith in human nature that some people are still so happy as to cherish. My daughter—who refused to come to-day,

knowing the subject to be discussed—is indignant at these reports; but of course she is a mere child, and very much fascinated by Miss Otis. I do not by any means approve of the drastic methods proposed by Mrs. Haight—I should hope that California had taken *some* of the old puritanical spirit out of us—but I do think that Miss Otis should be given to understand that she cannot import European fashions into Rosewater, and that she must have a chaperon. Let her feel that she has acted unwisely, at the very least, by not inviting her to any of the young people's gatherings in the future."

"As there are no more except for card-playing, and as she has recently been the only hostess at an evening party the town has boasted for two years, your virtuous wrath bids fair to blow past her unheeded. Mrs. Plews, will you address us?"

Mrs. Plews was the wife of the pastor of the aristocratic Episcopalian church, a pretty fluffy young woman, who visited the sick and made excellent ice-cream for the church festivals. "Oh, I don't know!" she exclaimed, deprecatingly. "It is all too dreadful! I no longer regret that Miss Otis does not come to church. I had thought of remonstrating with her once more—but when I recalled the last time! Now, it is indeed well that she has not been associating with our young folks. I am sorry this was not known before her party; I must really talk to Mr. Plews before I can say anything further."

"Mrs. Toffitt, I am sure that you have something to say—and an opinion of your own."

Mrs. Toffitt, a buxom highly colored woman of forty, who, since her husband's death, the year before, had continued his business—a general feed store—with striking

success, and who was one of the most popular women in Rosewater, with her abounding good-nature, her high spirits, and her utter independence of speech, sprang to her feet.

"I have this to say," she cried. "For a lot of puritanical, prying, spying, detestable old hens, we take the cake. Isabel Otis minds her own business. Why, in heaven's name, can't we mind ours? Does she owe anybody anything? Has she taken anybody's beau away? Anybody's husband? Does she walk the streets doing nothing but show herself, or go buggy riding with one fellow after another? Does she ever refuse money for charity, or for our improvements when it's asked of her? Was she a credit to the town with her record at the High School, or wasn't she? Are we proud of her travels in Europe, her high-toned connections, her business sense, the way she acted to that old reprobate of a father, or ain't we? That's what I want to know. And she's got real intellect instead of just the average American brightness; that's the secret of the whole trouble. What if she does sit up all night talking to a man who's got something besides chickens and dollars in his head? I'd do the same if I had the chance. Just make a note of that. If Mr. Gwynne likes to transfer his attentions to me I'll sit up all night right on Minerva Haight's doorstep, and talk about any old thing he wants. If I was as young and handsome as Isabel Otis I'd keep the best man going to myself, bet your life on it! And I repeat, it's nobody's business." She whirled upon the pallid Minerva with a flaming face. "Nice business you're in—sitting at your window all night watching for other people's slips. You'd make one fast enough if the Lord would let you, and that's

what's the matter with you. Now, put that in your pipe and smoke it."

She sat down amid much laughter and applause. Mrs. Leslie rapped vigorously for order, although her mouth was twitching.

"Now, ladies," she said, suavely, "if you have all relieved your minds I will say a few words. First of all, I wish to state that I shall refuse to put the matter to a vote. It is a question that does not come within the jurisdiction of the Club, which was not organized to supervise morals as well as streets and sewers. You can all act towards Isabel and Mr. Gwynne exactly as your consciences dictate, but for my own part, I have this to say: I am astonished to find that the Club life, a life which women the world over have prided themselves upon as the greatest factor in broadening and elevating that their sex has ever known, seems to have done, in our case at least, so little to eradicate certain Oriental instincts and traditions. The cities are full of young women living alone, and self-supporting. Why should not a girl have the same privilege in the country? Because she is handsome and distinguished? I fancy that a good many girls in analogous circumstances are passing unnoticed. I have not the least doubt that a very respectable percentage of very respectable young women, living alone in their city flats, sit up late and talk to men that are interesting enough to keep them awake. I am quite sure that were I young in these emancipated times I should take full advantage of them. And emancipated is what we pretend to be—although the word itself is somewhat outmoded; a healthy sign, proving that we are no longer labelled. And if that does not mean personal liberty, freedom from the old

ridiculous restrictions that were an insult to w
itself, what does it mean? It is a part of our
make woman as free and independent and hap
and without the slightest danger to the old high moral standards; for no woman that has had it in her to go wrong ever waited for the permission of her own sex. We are, in fact, we Club Women, the great sieve that separates the wheat from the chaff; the chaff has no more use for us than we have for it, and we are too wise in our own sex to waste any time on it. The women that were born to be the playthings of men are in a class apart—to be dealt with, to be sure, by Societies organized for and experienced in that purpose; and we have not even considered them in the stupendous effort we have made to secure the freedom of the higher order of women from the old miserable social thralldoms. And what we have accomplished is historic.

"I have seen extraordinary changes in my time. When I was young a woman was an old maid at twenty-five. There was no appeal. To-day there are no old maids. Twenty years ago, in that old exclusive set of San Francisco led by Mrs. Yorba, Mrs. Montgomery, and for a little while by poor Mary Belmont, it was almost unheard of for a girl of the better class to walk alone on the street. If a man joined her the city fermented. Now, what with the influx of all these new people, the social laws have been modified to such an extent that my old friends must turn in their graves; although, of course, and very properly, a certain amount of chaperonage for young society girls is still demanded. But it is a mere harness of flowers, worn as a sort of a joke for most of the people in society to-day have flown upward on happy golden wings from strata

where as much was known of chaperons as the American newspapers know about handling British titles. But, for my part, I find the whole change a vast improvement. Nothing could be duller than a girl's life in my time. And if society—the world of mere fashion—has broadened, how much more should be expected of us, who are the vanguard of our sex? who have set out to free women from every sort of senseless bondage they had endured for centuries, and no more from the tyranny of the physically stronger sex than through their own silliness and cowardice.

"We are struggling to enfranchise our sex. We would like to try our hand at regulating the affairs of the nation. Here, in these smaller towns, all over the country, we have proved a far greater power for improvements of all sorts than men. Rosewater owes to us, and to us alone, its beautifully paved and shaded streets—we have no difficulty in remembering what a barren mud-hole it was—the trees that shade the poor horses at the hitching-rails; the beautiful squares, the tropical plants and trees, the improved sewerage system, the cleanliness of the marsh border, everything in fact that has transformed Rosewater from a mere set of roofs and walls into a delightfully habitable town. Moreover, we have raised both the moral and the intellectual tone, for although I at least have always discouraged too much interest in people's private affairs, the higher interests, and the increased intimacy among women, have done much to keep them out of mischief. Until this card fever descended upon the town, it was generally regarded as occupying a high place among communities of its size. Cards, however, I regard as a passing madness; it merely means that even yet we have not enough to do.

"And—so it seems!—in spite of all that we have accomplished, in spite of our long and ofttimes disheartening struggle to lift ourselves above the average female woman, we are as ready to tear reputations to pieces as ever, to judge by mere appearances, to discount general character and behavior, to forget our ideals and give unlicensed rein to the mean and detestable qualities we still cherish in common with the mass of unenlightened women. I do not assert that I have never heard gossip from men; but it has always been from the men that spend their lives in Club windows, never from men that had some better way of filling their time. From my husband I have never heard a scurrilous word of any one, and he has a temper of his own, too. Now, so far as I can make out, we have not only been trying to usurp the time-honored prerogatives of men, but to attain their highest standards. While I deprecate violence of statement, I am inclined to agree with Mrs. Toffitt that a woman belonging to this Club, a Club which stands high in the Club life of the State, should have something better to do than to spend the night at her window spying on her neighbors. If she cannot sleep she can improve her mind or sew for the poor. If a man engaged in such nefarious night work and brazenly admitted it, I will venture to say that his Club, or his Lodge. at all events, would ask for his resignation. It would be quite in order with our avowed principles that we reprimanded Mrs. Haight instead of Miss Otis, but we will let the matter pass this time with a mere hint. One point is, by-the-way, that the latter not being a member of the Club it would be the height of impertinence to take her to task. But in any case I personally refuse even to consider the question of anything being otherwise with her

than it should be. There is, no doubt, some wholly commonplace explanation of Mr. Gwynne's passing through Rosewater on her horse this morning. As for their constant companionship, what more natural? They are closely related, and she has been a very necessary sister to him. Nevertheless, I shall make it my unpleasant business to tell her that we are still the same old females, still incapable of conceiving of aught but one relationship between unmarried members of opposite sexes, that our imaginations and our positive knowledge of life are alike undeveloped. Then she can take a chaperon or not as she pleases. She will always be welcome in my house; and as for my daughter, she will only laugh at this tempest of her elders in a tea-pot. That is all I have to say."

She finished amid much applause, some shamefaced, some hearty, but there were a number of lowering brows. When adjournment was declared a few moments later, she left at once, but the others remained to talk the matter over. The ingrained love of finding our sister worse than ourselves is not to be eradicated by a few years of Club life, and although the majority decided that Mrs. Leslie was quite in the right, several announced their intention to cut Isabel Otis. There was no informal resolution taken to ignore the matter, and, on the whole, Mrs. Haight went home with her crest up, and Mrs. Wheaton fasted for three days.

XXIX

MRS. LESLIE was a brave woman, but when the judge suggested that it would be better for him to talk the matter over with Gwynne, obtain his explanation, and delicately hint the attitude of the town, she was nothing loath to renounce her mission. "The dear child," the friends of her mother all remembered, had once possessed a temper that only the peculiar circumstances of her life had chastened, and they had an uneasy suspicion that it still smouldered beneath the well-bred insolence with which she had so far received much friendly advice.

By this time—mid-December was nigh—the judge and Gwynne had discussed many subjects besides the law. Mrs. Leslie, whose hospitable instincts were too deep to be blighted even by the servant question, had placed a room at Gwynne's disposal to be used when it rained, or he talked so late with the judge that the long ride home was not worth while. He dined with them several times a week, and found both these simple old-fashioned people delightful. And with Judge Leslie, alone of all his neighbors, could he discuss the affairs of the great world, get away from the politics and the small local interests that aborbed every other man in Rosewater. Moreover, Judge Leslie was well acquainted with his past career and often manifested a keen desire for details. Gwynne was not sure that these lapses were good for him, but certainly it was

pleasant, stretched out there by the big fireplace in an old room full of books, English for the most part, to talk of himself and his achievements. Isabel rarely referred to his past, never encouraged him to talk about it. His mother had become as silent as a mummy; old man Colton might have lost his memory, and for Tom Colton British politics had no existence.

But Judge Leslie understood and had much sympathy for his pupil—possibly believed in the virtue of the safety-valve. Certainly Gwynne invariably went to bed after these long talks content in mind and body; and the next day he was far too busy to trot out his ego and sit down with it. And his mind at least was happy in its new sense of expansion and acquisition, its increasing and developing powers. His studies had the further effect of moderating the purely personal viewpoint of the United States that had tormented him, and of enabling him to withdraw far enough to command glimpses of the New World as a great abstraction. And his contacts with the strange medley of small farmers and mechanics, with local politicians in back offices and saloons, even his acquaintance with the San Franciscans that were attempting to reclaim that bawdy borough, did not affect the universal idea he had at last succeeded in focussing. He had cast out disgust and disapproval as youthful and unphilosophical, resolved anew to play his part in the history of the country, letting the unborn events of his term of enforced quiescence determine what the part must be. He had not yet reached the stage of enthusiasm, but he had at least mounted to that of interest; and he had even caught himself wondering if, should a law pass in Great Britain, reducing the House of Peers to an elective body, or permitting peers of his



grade to sit in the House of Commons, he would return? There was little doubt that there was more good to be accomplished in the new country.

His English great-great-grandfather had been historically active in the reforms of 1832; a great-uncle had devoted his services to the passing of the Reform Act of 1867; and a cousin to the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883. Reform was in his blood, and as, after all, the United States was as much his own as Great Britain, he hoped in time to feel for it the same passion of affection he had cherished for the country that had given him fame and honors with both hands. And he knew that his other hope of being of practical service to the United States in accordance with his own ideal was no idle dream, for it was quite apparent from the newspapers and reviews that the best men all over the country were awake at last to the perils besetting the Republic, and that a bloodless revolution was slowly making its way over the country. He had unmitigated contempt for the revolutionist of the red shirt, insatiable for the notoriety so easily obtained by appealing to the passions of men a shade more ignorant than himself; no blood revolution was possible in the United States during its present condition of prosperity. No country can be universally roused to revolt with any weapons more deadly than words until it has long felt the pinch of hunger in its vitals, and watched millions starve while hundreds consumed the fat of the land. No doubt there was grinding poverty in the crowded tenement districts of the Eastern States, but those men were not the stuff of which revolutionists were made, if only because they deliberately elected the rigors of the town rather than supply the crying demand for labor and servants through-

out the country. It was only the idle that foregathered and talked anarchism or even socialism; not those that cared to work.

Here in California there was practically no such thing as poverty, or if there was, the pauper, if fairly able of body, should be set up in a public pillory. With a scale of wages the highest in the world, a corresponding cheapness of every necessity of life, with the bare exception of coal, needed in excess during one short season of the twelve-month, sun for eight unbroken months, and a soil so fertile that in many places it yielded two crops a year, there would have been no discontent had it not been for the rapacity of labor unions, and the systematic agitations of men like Tom Colton. In every human heart there is the germ of discontent, no matter what the conditions, but Gwynne recognized the possibility of diverting this uneasy parasite from imaginary personal grievances to the public good, to measures which would benefit the mass, subtly elevating man's opinion of himself in the process, and so taking the first long stride in the direction of general political reform. It was only by making the masses see their own part in the abominable political corruption that made "graft" universal, and permitted the rapid concentration of the country's wealth into a few insolent hands, that the decapitation of the swarms of professional politicians could be accomplished. In no part of the United States could such reforms be attempted with anything like the same prospect of success, as in this State with its traditions of contempt of money for its own sake, and its almost primeval sense of independence. It was true that there was no superb indifference to money in the small towns, but much of the old spirit lingered among those that lived close to



the soil; and Gwynne had never seen such uncalculating lavishness, such a humorous contempt for economy as in San Francisco. He was himself generous by instinct and habit, but this gay reckless openhandedness, whether a man had anything to spend or not, had already stirred some deeper instinct still, possibly his pioneer, perhaps his Spanish, and he had never enjoyed anything more in his life than certain nights in San Francisco, when he had sallied forth with his pockets full of gold and returned to Russian Hill on foot for want of a five-cent piece to pay his car-fare. He had himself too well in hand ever to give permanent rein to any such latent propensities, and he had no intention of impoverishing himself, but the fact that the genius of the city was in his blood warmed it to the strange, fascinating, wicked, friendly, young-old city on the rim of the Pacific.

As it happened, he was not in the humor for reading on the morning after the meeting of the female clans, nor were there any clients in the outer office, and he uttered some of his impressions aloud to the judge who was sitting restlessly by the window, ostensibly watching Main Street. Gwynne had wondered at the old gentleman's sudden idleness, but fell easily into conversation this languid morning that was more like spring than belated winter.

"I can understand the fascination of San Francisco for anybody," said the uneasy judge. "I wonder—" with a sudden inspiration, "if it wouldn't be better for you to go into the law-office of a friend of mine down there for a while. I mean—" in response to Gwynne's look of astonishment, "of course I should hate to lose you—quite as much as I hated to lose my own son, and yours is the only society in which I have found any positive refreshment for years.

But—well! in fact it would be as well for you to leave Rosewater for a while—until all this talk has died out."

"What talk?"

The judge felt what courage was left in him oozing under Gwynne's icy stare.

"Oh Lord! It's just this, Gwynne—just fancy I am really your father. There are a lot of infernal old hens in this town—where don't they roost, anyway?—and they have been exercising themselves over your going out to Isabel's so much, especially at night. They've got the idea into their empty heads that Isabel has come back from Europe, where she lived by herself, with all sorts of free-and-easy notions. Perhaps the real truth is that they distrust any girl as handsome as that who won't marry. The talk didn't amount to much until yesterday morning—"

"Ah!" Gwynne stood up and took his hat from the little private rack. "Suppose you ask Mrs. Leslie to tell the hens that I have spent a great many futile evening hours, the only ones I have at my private disposal, trying to induce Miss Otis to marry me, and that yesterday evening, after the fourth or fifth refusal, I borrowed her horse, having walked out, and rode half-way to San Francisco to steady my nerves. Love and the law combined are somewhat of a load to carry. I will go out now and try my luck again. Perhaps this talk will influence her a bit. In fact I promise that it shall."

XXX

GWYNNE found Isabel just stepping out of her launch, after a business morning in Rosewater, and was hospitably invited to dismount and remain for luncheon.

"Would you mind asking your Jap to make us some sandwiches and come with me up to my mountain shanty?" he asked. "I have rather a headache and want a long ride. Besides, it is high time I went. I should look over the roads, which they tell me are very bad after the heavy rains. I want to go into camp there in the early spring—have invited Hofer and one or two others for salmon-fishing. I have now sent three letters to the tenant, one Clink, by teamsters, and he has never replied. For all I know he may have burned the house down and decamped. So, altogether, this seems to me the time to go, and it would be very jolly to have you with me."

"I'd like nothing better," said Isabel, delightedly, "after talking eggs and chickens all morning. And I haven't been up to Mountain House for years. It used to belong to Uncle Hiram, you know. He always fished there in the spring, and took me with him. Then Mr. Colton bought it in—I won't be ten minutes."

"Now I know why you wear that hideous divided habit and ride astride," said Gwynne as they started. "I have been half-way up the mountain once or twice, to say nothing of the Marin hills, and I have never seen such

roads. They are a disgrace to the State. Why on earth doesn't the legislature take them in hand?"

"Now *I* know *you* are in a bad humor," said Isabel, laughing. "You grumbled at everything when you first came to California, and now that you have become philosophical like the rest of us, you only anathematize when you are put out. I saw something was wrong the moment you arrived. What is it?"

"I'll tell you later. This is our only chance for a sharp trot."

It was quite two miles to the ascending road at the foot of the mountain range that divided the great valley. It rose gently for a time then suddenly became steep. Lumpy and slanting, already dangerously narrow in many places, for there had been a few days of hard rain, it led along the edge of cañons and chasms, creeks and little valleys as round as a bowl. Here and there was a farm-house or a country home on a slope, set in the midst of fields just turning green. The first stretch of road—cut roughly in the mountain-side and then left to take care of itself—was on county property, but after an hour's climb along the flank of the mountain they reached the part of the great mass included in Lumalitas, where the road, although still public, had been mended now and again by tenants that had used the camp in the fishing season.

"It is even worse than I thought," grumbled Gwynne. "I wonder if Tom Colton could be induced to put in a bill at the next legislature. It would be a good opportunity for him to make a promise with some hope of fulfilment."

"The trouble is the farmers don't care," said Isabel, shrugging her shoulders. "There are only a few of them in the mountains and they have jogged up and down these

bad roads so many years that they accept them as a matter of course. I don't know that I mind this, myself. It certainly is more picturesque than if it had become popular with automobilists of much influence in legislative councils."

"At present you have to ride with your eyes on the road to make sure it is there."

"We can take turns, and it certainly is beautiful."

"Oh, beautiful!"

But when the road improved for quite half a mile, he too gave himself up to the sensation of being lost in the heart of a mountain. The valley was far behind them and out of sight. There were groves of ancient oaks in the hollows, turbulent streams foaming over masses of rocks that had fallen from the cliffs above. Sometimes they looked down a thousand sheer feet into a bit of wilderness as unbroken as if on each side of the range man had not snatched the fertile lands from the savage a century before.

The air grew colder and Isabel put on her covert coat. But it was a clear sparkling day, and when they reached the summit they could see San Francisco, a smoky mirage forty miles to the south, the ferry-boats crawling like beetles across the bay, the surf of the ocean on the rocks beyond the Golden Gate, a vast sweep of gray ocean; and the bulk of Tamalpais, that from this high point looked as if it had heaved itself free of the mass of mountains and forests about it. Two thousand feet below, their own valley, with its marsh and fertile ranches, looked like a dark ribbon between the hills, Rosewater like a toy village.

They trotted their horses for a few moments on the level and then rode down into the little valley where an un-

successful farmer of solitary habit had some time since rented the few acres of land surrounding Mountain House, with the understanding that the best rooms were to be at the disposal of the lord of Lumalitas during the fishing and hunting seasons. The log-house, or "camp," was very solid and had been built by the first James Otis, who was a mighty hunter; and the salmon-fishing in the creek, at present containing but a few feet of water, was so fine that hardly a spring had passed without a visit from the tenants of Lumalitas, who were constrained by the terms of the lease to keep the house in repair. Of late this had been the duty of the sub-lessee, and as no teams passed his isolated dwelling, and as he had not seen fit to answer his landlord's communications, even verbally, by the boy from one of the lower ranches who had carried up the missives, all Gwynne knew was that Mr. Clink was alive, and that the ranch was free of winter débris.

They found the gentleman sitting on a stump. He had a hand on either knee, and his small watery unblinking eyes were fixed on space. A beard, narrow and grizzled and stained, rested on his lean front, or stirred gently in the breeze. He neither rose, nor otherwise noticed the approach of his visitors.

Gwynne called, shouted, approached the verge of profanity, but he might as well have addressed the silent forest.

Isabel elevated her nose. "To use the vernacular, he is on a long, slow, melancholy jag. I will go in and see how he keeps the house. It needs an airing at least. Every window is closed and probably has been all winter."

She remained in-doors half an hour, putting things to rights with many mysterious touches known only to her

sex. When she returned to Gwynne she found him sunning himself on the porch with his back to Mr. Clink, who stolidly regarded an old stump of geranium.

"It is clean enough," she said. "But when you come, bring new blankets—or send them, and your provisions—the day before you bring your guests. I will come up with them and see that everything is in order. I might also turn the hose on Clink, if he has chosen that occasion to drench himself inside. At all events bring a cook—you can have Chuma; these people never can cook anything but fried meat and potatoes."

Drifted leaves lay on the porch a foot deep. Isabel found a broom and swept vigorously, snubbing Gwynne's offer to do it himself. He watched her, crossly reflecting that she was never so unattractive as in that dust-colored divided habit, and wishing that he had waited for the evening hour; even if infrequently seductive, she was always lovely in a becoming gown.

Finally, her labors over, she dusted an aged rocking-chair and sat down, fanning herself with her hat. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkling, but she turned to look at the beautiful creek that had torn its way through the forest, and Gwynne suddenly felt that he hated her profile. During the last few weeks he had lost that sense of a constant and secret contest of wills, perhaps because his own had proved the stronger in the final engagement; perhaps, who knew? because she possessed all the infernal subtlety of the Spaniard. But her profile suggested relentless power, and he still had a secret hankering for the old-fashioned submissive female, liberal and indulgent to the sex as he was. He had reflected that he had met so many handsome finely developed girls, with a sufficiency of animated

brightness, but well within the type, during the past few weeks, that it was rather odd he had not been captured; particularly as several of the most ripping would add materially to his fortunes. But he had come to the conclusion sometime since, when he hardly knew, that he would prefer to remain unmarried, and enjoy the intimate companionship of a congenial and interesting creature like Isabel, whom he never quite understood. He cursed the stale old conventions that interfered with his desires.

Isabel turned suddenly and smiled. "How fierce you look!" she said. "What is the matter?"

"Everything. Some one, Mrs. Haight, I suppose, saw me riding home on your horse at three o'clock yesterday morning, and the whole town is by the ears. Judge Leslie undertook to break the news to me, and I told him I had gone out to propose, and then ridden about the country to calm my raging fires. I feel that I owe it to you to propose in good earnest, and such as I am you are welcome to me."

"I never heard such a graceful proposal. I wouldn't marry you if Rosewater stood on its head."

"I was rather brutal about it, and I must honestly confess that I'm not particularly keen on marrying you, but I think we'll have to marry, or be deuced uncomfortable—"

"Oh, nothing to what we should be if married. And Rosewater to me is a mere market for chickens and eggs. The only punishment they could inflict on me would be to burn down the hatcheries. I hate to bother with incubators."

Gwynne stood up and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "We must be serious," he said. "They are really malignant about it. I have felt it in the air for some time. Every time I pass that she-devil, Mrs. Haight, on Main

Street, her eyes contract with a sort of malicious warning. 'Just you wait!' is the way she would phrase it. And I always *feel* her at her window when I ride home late. No woman of your age and beauty can defy public opinion alone. The world—and scandal spreads like a plague; San Francisco is only forty miles from Rosewater—the world can hurt you in a thousand ways, ruin your life. I really am only too willing to protect you, and I hope that you will marry me. I am sure we should get along—after a bit."

"That was better. But I will not be driven into matrimony by gossip, or even scandal. That is no part of my scheme of life. And I know Rosewater better than you do. Mrs. Leslie, Anabel, Mrs. Colton, many of the most powerful, would never believe a word against me."

"Not at first. But malicious tongues will wear the gloss from the best-befriended reputation in time. The kindest natures are conventional; and susceptible to all that take, or seem to take, a place in the ranks of established facts."

"I won't do it," said Isabel, stubbornly; and as she turned her profile to him he almost swore aloud. "I shall conquer, or prove the whole modern game of woman a sham, a fool's paradise. I told you that I had set myself to drag strength out of the unknown forces. Well, I propose to use it now. And in your behalf as much as mine."

"I can take care of myself. . . . I even think I could face the prospect of becoming your husband with a reasonable amount of equanimity." She was looking straight at him again, her face deeply flushed, her eyes shining. "It never occurred to me before, but I believe that if you would permit yourself to develop, you might become the most

fascinating woman in the world. And if you did, I swear that you should be happy."

"I am happy, and in my own way. I get something out of every moment. Do you think I am going to run the risk of losing all that for anything so dubious as this old game of sex?"

"Very good game if it is played properly. I have a mind to teach you."

"Well, you will not!"

"I think I shall. It is either marry you or leave California."

"That is a threat unworthy of you."

"No threat at all. If you will not permit me to protect you in one way I must in another. I leave and throw everything over with great éclat. You have discarded me and I cannot stand the proximity."

"They might merely think that you were running away from me."

"I shall take good care they think what I choose. Women are more romantic and sentimental than malignant, the bulk. All they want is a starter."

"But you need not leave California. You can move to San Francisco."

"Now you are talking like a child. I shall return to England. As to my American career, my only chance lies here. I hate the rest of the country, and the best material is in California, anyhow. Yesterday I received a letter from my solicitor, enclosing one from Jimmy, who informed me that I was on every tongue, that the public curiosity was piqued, that the newspapers were demanding that I should return and accept my responsibilities, and that without doubt a place would be made for me in the

new Liberal Cabinet. It is a propitious moment for return. If there is a time when a Liberal peer can make any running it is when his party is in power."

There was a pause for several moments. Gwynne filled and lit another pipe. Isabel stared at a ring she twisted about her finger, Mr. Clink at the geranium stump. The low dull roar in the forest tops was unceasing, but for other sound of life they might have swung off into space.

Finally Isabel spoke. "I won't marry you," she said. "But all ends will be served if we announce an engagement. We can state that we think it best not to marry until your law studies are concluded. It can be postponed once or twice on other pretexts, then fall through. By that time gossip will be forgotten, people will have lost interest in us. In San Francisco they are not likely to hear of this at all, or if they do it will not matter, and if you fall in love with any of the *cotillon* beauties I will release you in due form and give you my blessing."

"I have not the least intention of undertaking life with a *cotillon* beauty. Your compromise will do for the present, but you will understand that my proposal is a bona fide one, should you arrive at a more rational frame of mind."

"I sha'n't fall a victim to any irrational state of mind. I won't marry. Why, even people that like me too much interfere with my sense of liberty."

Gwynne laughed. "We had better be starting," he said.

XXXI

THEY parted at the foot of the mountain, and as Isabel approached her own house she saw Anabel Colton's trap tied to the garden gate. She set her teeth and slackened the pace of her horse, but Anabel and Miss Boutts had seen her, and leaned over the edge of the veranda, calling to her impatiently. She gave her horse a cut with the whip and rode rapidly to the stable. When she finally reached the veranda she greeted her friends courteously enough, and then, as she noted their expression of defiant loyalty, remarked, sweetly:

"Of course you have been expecting to hear that I am engaged to Mr. Gwynne, but I only really made up my mind to-day."

"Isabel!" Both fell on her neck, Dolly with tears, and she responded with what enthusiasm was in her, and gently deposited them into two of the veranda chairs. With a very fair simulation of the engaged girl she answered their rapid fire of questions, and even informed Anabel that she would prefer silver to china when the day for presents arrived, and promised that she should come to the rehearsal of the ceremony, since, unfortunately, the young matron's own happy state debarred her from officiating at the altar. But she was averse from lying, even by implication, and was glad to see them go. After they had turned for the last time to blow her a kiss, she went within, slammed all the



doors on the lower floor, stamped her feet, and hurled a book across the room. Finally she swore. After that she felt better and sat down to read a letter from Mrs. Hofer that awaited her.

". . . I can't do anything with your Lady Victoria" [the lively young matron ran on after a few preliminary enthusiasms]. "She went everywhere at first, but just sat round looking like a battered statue out of the Vatican with some concession in the way of clothes—not so much. Literally she made no effort whatever, and, you know, *American men won't stand that.* Perhaps that's the reason she suddenly called off and refused to go anywhere. But what can she expect? American women may talk too much, but at any rate they are the sort American men know like a book, and our knights have no use for inanimate beauties a good many years younger than my Lady Victoria.

"Now she appears to do nothing but walk—stalk rather. She goes over these hills as if she had on seven-league boots. One would think she was possessed by the furies; or perhaps she is afraid of getting fat.

"I am simply dying to see you again. If you don't mind—I like you better than any one I ever met. You combine everything, and although you make me feel as fresh as paint and as Irish as Paddy Murphy's pig, still you always put me in a better humor with myself than ever. How do you do it? You suggest all sorts of things that I can't define at all. Comes of living alone and making a success of it, I suppose, getting ahead of mere femininity and all the pettinesses of life. That's flying rather high for me, so I'd better come down. Please *make* Mr. Gwynne come to my party. I intend that party to be the greatest thing ever given in California—since the old

Monte Cristo Ralston days, anyhow: and have all sorts of surprises that I won't tell even you. The ballroom is quite finished and is a perfect success. It is *too* fine to think that you will make your formal début in it. Everybody is coming. Mr. Gwynne simply must. I know of about a dozen girls who would have given him the *cotillon* if he had asked them, and even now, when they are all engaged, I know of at least two who would not hesitate to throw their men over. We all like him tremendously, the men as well as the women. Mr. Hofer and I—do you know, we have just a dark suspicion—where *is* Elton Gwynne, anyway? That would be too good to be true. He could own the town. We know an *individual* when we see one, and wouldn't we appreciate the compliment! We'd like him all the better for having accepted him when he was plain John Gwynne, and we'd like ourselves better still. You know how we make up our own minds out here. Look at the famous actors and singers we've rejected, and the reputations we've made. Not like New York, that never expresses an opinion until a sort of consensus has sweated up to the surface. I hate New York. Can't you come down and pay me a visit of a week? I should love it. Call me up on the telephone."

Isabel pondered over this missive for a few moments and then reread parts of a long letter she had received the day before from Flora Thangue.

". . . I almost wish Jack would return, although at first I approved of his going. His case seemed so desperate. But since the elections there has been so much talk of him, so many prophecies as to what he will do when he returns —they believe him to be travelling in South America—so much seems to be expected of him, especially now that the

Liberals are in, and there is so much dissatisfaction with the Cabinet—I really believe he would be the one to keep the party in power and that his becoming prime-minister would be a question of only a few years. Not such a bad outlook! But I don't care to say all this to Jack—or even to Vicky. You are responsible for the present state of affairs, and I am sure you realize what a tremendous responsibility it is. Besides, you know every side of the question over there as I do not. Think it over, dear Isabel. . . . Julia Kaye, I happen to know, has been trying to get his address. So far, she has not landed another big fish, and no doubt thinks that Jack's disgust and enthusiasm have both worn themselves out by this time. Don't send him back, but bring him. Of course he has fallen in love with you. Besides, you could accomplish any mortal thing you put your will to. Do, please, think it all over. A few years' delay, and he might return and find it too late. The public memory is short. There are rivals. The one he had most to fear from has an Undersecretaryship, and lets no one forget him. There will be deep resentment at too long an absence, especially if he should become an American citizen meanwhile. They would never forgive that.

". . . About Vicky. I wish I could have gone with her, but she did not feel that she could afford to take me, and Vicky's spasms of economy are not to be discouraged. But, thank heaven, she has you and Jack. Perhaps all she really needed was a change: she was always an individual, but she got to be distinctly peculiar after you left—nerves, I suppose: only instead of being merely irritable like other women she sealed herself up like a Mahatma preparing for astral flight. I only wish she was one. Women of her class no longer take to religion, when the fires are dead, but they certainly need a substitute, and I should think theosophy would be as good as

any. It is such a delightful mixture of vagueness and cock-sureness, and even more picturesque than Romanism. It is time for me to follow the fashion and write a book, and I think I'll paint the mysterious delights of India as a late autumn resort. I am so sick of all these public mausoleums for youth! It would be a positive relief to think of all our erstwhile beauties stretched out in some frescoed cave with their ears and eyes and noses sealed up with wax, while their ever-youthful spirits sallied forth for new conquests on the astral plane. But Vicky never 'made up': one must say that much for her. Only this terrible fetich of youth! Heavens! the tragedies my sympathetic soul has endeavored to see as tragedies only. Not that growing old seems to be the worst of it. The underlying tragedy is that they can't care enough, and this they take to be the real end of youth, and patter up and down the old worn-out track of device, trying to fool themselves as well as others. But Vicky, as I said, is an individual: a touch or two more and she might have been a genius. She is like the mass of women in many things, heaven knows, but her divergences are the more startling; and the point of divergence lies down in the roots of her pride. She suddenly felt the complete loss, the final departure of youth, and she accepted it like a fallen goddess, and refused even the sudden and startling renewal of Sir Cadge Vanneck's devotions. She had nothing left to give him, and although her pride may have urged her to show the world that she still could capture a man like that, I think he really bored her to death, and she was satisfied to parade him for a time and then publicly throw him over. And she once loved him, I am certain of it. That is tragedy, if you like. I fancy she has desperate moments, but she will pull through in her own way. Don't delude yourself with the notion that she is sitting down in sackcloth and ashes with her past! Those

women don't repent, for they never admit that the laws of common mortals apply to them. What is their royal pleasure to do they do, and when it is over a square inch of their memory might have gone with it. To mull themselves, commit some flagrant error that lands them in the divorce court, or high and dry in the outskirts—that is another matter. They repent then, *sans doute;* and get no mercy. We overlook everything at this apex of civilization but stupidity. We respect the high-handed but not the light-headed. That is one reason those long-winded novels of sin and repentance—generally over one slip and when the man has wearied—leave us cold. We know too much. It seems such a lot of fuss about so little. If some of these good, painstaking, and—let us whisper it—bourgeoise novelists had seen one-tenth of the pagan disregard for all they cherish most highly, that I have seen, and if they could only be made to comprehend—which they never could—how absolutely admirable these same women are in many other respects—such capacity for deep undying friendship, such uncalculating loyalty, such racial possibilities of heroism—well, they would do a good deal harder thinking than they have had to do yet, if they attempted to readjust their traditions to the actual facts of life. But the old traditions get back at our women all the same, although they don't suspect it. They pay the penalty in that late—sometimes not so late—intolerable maddening ennui. Heavens! how many women I have heard wish they were dead. Thank God I am a virgin!

"Of course, dear Isabel, I would not write like this about Vicky to any one on earth but yourself. But she is on your hands, so to speak, and I feel you should have some sort of comprehension of her. To understand her fully is impossible. She is unhappy, that is the main thing—what with all I have intimated, and the great change in her fortunes—I can hardly imagine Vicky without Capheaton

and the reflected glory of 'Elton Gwynne'; and, no doubt, she finds California an exile and has realized by this time that she can be of little use to Jack. Better make a fortune for her in your wonderful American way and bring them both home."

XXXII

ISABEL called up Mrs. Hofer on the telephone, and after being switched off and on half a dozen times, and crossed wires and all the other mishaps peculiar to the California telephone service had reduced both to a state of furious indifference, Mrs. Hofer accepted Miss Otis's inability to go down to San Francisco until the day of the party, and her promise to pay the visit during Christmas week, with equal philosophy.

The party was to be on the night of the 24th, and Isabel did not see Gwynne again until the evening of the same day. Judge Leslie went to Santa Barbara to spend the holidays with his son, and his pupil to Burlingame and Menlo Park for a week. After the polo and various other sports at the former resort, with a set that bore an outline resemblance to the leisure class of his own country, the gay life at the Club and the multitude of pretty girls always flitting amid compact masses of flowers, he found the now unfashionable borough of Menlo Park somewhat dull; although he had good snipe-shooting on the marsh with his host, Mr. Trennahan. The whole valley, however, had a peculiar charm for him; when riding alone past the fields of ancient oaks with the great mountains on either side, almost a sense of possession. For all this magnificent and richly varied sweep of land, now cut up into a few large estates and an infinite number of small ones, into towns,

and villages, hamlets, and even cities, had once been the Rancho El Pilar, and the property of his Mexican ancestor, Don José Arguello. He knew that in those old days it must have looked like a vast English park, and he felt some resentment that his ancestors had not had the wit to hold fast to it until his time came to inherit.

Mrs. Trennahan's father, Don Roberto Yorba, had bought a square mile from one of the Arguello heirs, and a few rich men of his time had followed his example; and slept in their country-houses during six months of the year while their women yawned the days away, deriving their principal solace in contemplation of their unchallenged exclusiveness. Stray members of those old families were left, and were, if anything, more exclusive than their parents, disdaining the light-hearted people of Burlingame, unburdened with traditions. This was still the set that never even powdered, faithful to the ancient code that it was not respectable, and who spent the greater part of the year in the country, finding their pleasures in the climate—soporific—excellent old Chinese or Spanish cooks, and in reminiscences of the time when the fine estates had not been cut up into little suburban homesteads for heaven only knew whom.

Mrs. Trennahan had sold her father's place, and bought a superb estate in the foothills, where she entertained in the simple fashion of the Eighties. Trennahan still took the haughty spirit of his chosen borough with all his old humor, but he liked no place so well, even in California. A New-Yorker is always a New-Yorker, however long he may live in California, but he becomes more and more attached to the independent life, the even climate, above all to the cooking; and Trennahan

was no exception. He had found Magdaléna the most comfortable of companions, she had presented him with two fine boys—who were preparing for college, at present—and a lovely daughter; and he was, in a leisurely way, collecting earthquake data, for future publication, and amused himself with a seismograph; which worried Magdaléna, who thought the instrument much too intimate with earthquakes to be a safe piece of household furniture. Gwynne liked them both as well as any people he had met in California, and engaged the beautiful Inez—who would seem to have embodied all her mother's old passionate longing for physical loveliness—to dance several times with him at the great ball which was to be the medium of her introduction to society.

"I am still old-fashioned," Mrs. Trennahan confided to Gwynne, with a sigh. "I never have liked new people and I never shall; Mr. Trennahan has not laughed it out of me. But what will you? They are seven-eighths strong in San Francisco, I have a daughter who naturally demands the rights of her youth—so I make the best of a bad bargain. But I protest."

When Gwynne arrived at the house on Russian Hill late in the evening it occurred to him to tap on Isabel's door and tell her that he had obeyed her orders, recalled all the traditions down in their common ancestor's old domain, and "got the feel" of the place. He had never crossed the threshold of this room although he had brushed his hair many times in the spotless bower by the marsh, and he was surprised, after a moment's colloquy through the panels, by an invitation to enter. He was still more surprised to find Isabel sitting before her dressing-table in full regalia, although they were not to start for the party until

eleven o'clock. She wore the white tulle gown with the dark-blue lilies in which she had created a sensation at Ascot, and looked more radiant than he had ever seen her. Her eyes were like stars, her cheeks were pink; her red lips were parted, the upper trembling with excitement.

"Come! Look!" she cried. "See what your mother has given me. I had to dress at once to see the whole effect."

She lifted and fingered rapturously a row of splendid pearls that lay on her neck.

"Did you ever see anything so beautiful? All my life I have wanted a string of pearls—real pearls that you read about, although I thought myself fortunate to have that old string of Baha California pearls, and never expected anything better. At first I wouldn't take them, but Cousin Victoria said they were her mother's, a gift from *her* father when she married, so that I ought to inherit them, anyhow; and might as well have them while I was young. She vowed she should never wear them again, as her skin was no longer white enough for pearls. I can't believe it!"

Gwynne looked at her curiously. "I had no idea you cared for those things. I could have given you pearls. Your pose has always been to scorn the common weaknesses of your sex."

"You are just a dense man! I have all my sex's love of personal adornment, if you like to call that a weakness. Do you suppose I admire myself in that riding-habit or those overalls? Don't I always dress for supper even when alone? Have I not a lot of lovely gowns? Look at this one! I am so glad I never wore it again until to-

night. As for jewels, I adore them, and when I am a millionaire I shall have little shovels full like those you see in jewellers' windows, just to handle; and the most lovely combinations to wear. But I don't ruin my complexion pining for what I can't have—or have lost. Of course poor mamma had beautiful jewels, but they went the way of all things."

Gwynne looked at his watch. "I shall get a bite in town," he said. "The shops will be open till midnight. Hofer will endorse a check for me; I have sold three farms in the past week and have a pot of money in the bank. There is something else I want you to wear to-night—"

"I won't take jewels from you—"

"You are not only my fiancée but my cousin—"

"Nonsense!"

"I shall be back in about two hours. Mind you are sitting just there when I arrive."

As he went swiftly out and closed the door, she shrugged her shoulders, and her eyes danced with anticipation. After all, she could return his present when the farce was over, and she was in a mood to have the world poured into her lap.

She dined alone with her Puritan and Spanish ancestors, and when the brief meal was over, went up and exhibited herself to Lady Victoria, who was in a state of silent fury at being the victim of a headache. She complimented Isabel upon her appearance, however, and added:

"I hope this pretended engagement will end in reality. You are of our blood. I recognize it more and more. I am thankful he escaped Julia Kaye. You are—could be—all I am afraid I compelled myself to believe she was."

"Do you want him to go back to England?" asked

Isabel. "I had a letter from Flora the other day, and she thinks it is my mission to restore him to his country."

"I don't care. What difference does it make? I want him to be happy, and he can have a career anywhere. In your case beauty is not a curse, and I should be glad to see you concentrate your gifts where you can find and give real happiness. Now, enjoy yourself like a girl to-night and don't bother about Jack or any one else—certainly not about me," as Isabel stood looking down upon her with a puckered brow.

Lady Victoria, in a négligée of salmon pink under a red light, and reclining on her divan with a box of cigarettes beside her, and a French novel in her hand, looked little less handsome than when she had captivated Isabel's girlish fancy a year ago. It was only the utter weariness of the eyes, and a subtle hardening of the whole mask of the always immobile face, that betrayed the sudden rupture with a long complacent youth. But she looked at Isabel's glorious youth without a pang of envy in her cynical, if not yet philosophical, soul, and said again, with emphasis:

"Marry him. You can do it. Any woman can marry any man she wants. That is the reason we are never really happy. We never love men, as we imagine that we could love. We have fevers for them that last a few weeks, and then we become maternal and endure them. We might love a demi-god, never man as we know him. Perhaps in some other world—who knows?"

Isabel pricked up her ears. Was Lady Victoria meditating the consolations of the Church—or of Flora's more modern substitute? What a solution! But she dared not ask. She was still a little afraid of her complicated rel-

ative. She begged her not to read too late, and went out, promising to conciliate the offended Mrs. Hofer.

As she walked down the hall she stooped absently and picked up a scrap of paper, hardly aware that she held it in her hand until she sat down once more before her mirror. Then she glanced at it. To her surprise it was an advertisement of a prize-fight, cut from a newspaper, and on the margin an illiterate hand had scrawled, "*Nine o'clock sharp.*" She wondered which of the servants was indulging in the distractions of the ring. All except Lady Victoria's maid were Japs. Could the Frenchwoman have found a lover who had introduced her to the forbidden pleasures of the town? Obviously it was not Gwynne's for the date was two days old, and he had been in Menlo Park at the time. But she had more interesting things to ponder over. Being a good housekeeper, she folded the scrap and hid it under one of the little silver trays, intending to give it in the morning to Lady Victoria, who was the temporary mistress of the mansion. Then she fell to counting her pearls, wound them twice about her throat, decided that she preferred the single long ellipse falling among the blue flowers on her bosom, marvelled, in an abandon of femininity, at the dazzling whiteness of her skin. She was beautiful, no doubt of that; it might be as Lady Victoria and Flora Thangue asserted, that any future she chose was hers to command; and, as the latter had intimated, to be an English peeress, with her husband at the head of the state, was no mean destiny. To-night, her almost fanatical love of California was dormant. She felt wholly personal. Whatever the future, she wanted to be the most admired girl at this party to-night, to dominate its long-heralded splendors as a great

soprano rises high and triumphant above the orchestral thunders of a Wagner opera. Old instincts were stirring subtly. She had the rest of her life for great ideals. To-night she would be an old-time belle: as Concha Argüello had been just a century ago, as Guadalupe Hathaway, Mrs. Hunt McLane, Nina Randolph, and "The Three Macs," had been in the city's youth; as Helena Belmont had been but twenty years before. She recalled the oft-told story of the night of Mrs. Yorba's great ball, in the house next to the one which was to be the theatre of her own début, when Magdaléna Yorba, Tiny Montgomery, Ila Brannan, and the wonderful Helena had been introduced to San Francisco, and the most distracting belle the town had ever known had turned the heads of fifty men. It was far easier to be a belle in that simpler time than to-day, when the San Franciscan vied with the New-Yorker in the magnificence of furnishing and attire, and a mere million was no longer a fortune. And the city more than maintained its old standard of beauty, for its population had nearly doubled; the handsome girls of the upper class had learned the art of dress, and even among the shop-girls there was a surfeit of pretty faces and fine busts. As to the demi-monde it was the pick of America, for obvious reason.

But Isabel was an ardent dreamer, and as she sat in her silent old home, high above the city's unresting life, she imagined herself into a blissful picture where she should realize to the full all the desires dear to the heart of a girl. It was true that she had created a *furore* that night at Arcot, but her triumph had been extinguished by fright and the tragedies that came in its train. And no triumph abroad ever quite equals the conquest of your own territory.

Isabel concluded that if it were a matter of a single season, she would rather reign in San Francisco than in London—but her dreams were cut short by Gwynne's rapid step on the plank walk, and a moment later he was tapping on her door.

She looked up at him with undisguised expectancy.

"I am going to enjoy it," she said. "I shall accept it. I don't care!"

"I should hope so, after all the trouble I have had." He sat down in a low chair beside the dressing-table and facing her. "Hofer had been turned out of the house and had taken refuge at the Mission. I took an automobile and rushed out there, only to find that he and his friends had concluded to come in and dine at one of the restaurants. Definite, but I know their tastes pretty well, and finally tracked them down. By that time I was starved, but when the dinner was over Hofer went with me himself to the jeweller's—"

"What is it?" asked Isabel, impatiently, her eyes on a long box Gwynne had taken from his pocket.

But Gwynne seldom had an opportunity to tease her. He drew his finger along the heavy coil of hair that rose from the very nape of her neck and pushed forward a soft little mass on to the brow. "I have always wanted to see something here," he said. "I remember once seeing a lovely print of the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, who wore her hair somewhat as you do—"

"Not a bit of it. Her hair was generally half-way down her back—"

"Well the effect was the same—and in this print she had a row of daisies or stars; I never could remember which—"

"You haven't brought me daisies?" said Isabel, in disgust.

Gwynne pressed the little gilt nob, and as the lid flew up Isabel cried out, with delight.

"You shouldn't! But I don't care! I said I wouldn't. I never expected anything so gorgeous, though—"

She caught the box from his hand and fastened the diamond stars in the line he had indicated. There were five, graduated in size, and they gave her beauty its final touch of poetry and light. Isabel gazed at her dazzling reflection with parted lips and dancing eyes, then turned impulsively, flung her arms about Gwynne's neck, and kissed him. He pushed her away roughly.

"Don't do that again!" he said. "I am not your brother, nor one of your girl friends. Can I look about? I have always had a curiosity to see this room. I had an idea that it was different from the one at the ranch."

"You can look at what you like," said Isabel, indifferently. "I shall look at my stars. *Madre de Dios!* as our Spanish ancestors would have said. *Ay yi! Valgame Dios! Dios de mi alma! Dios de mi vida!* I never was so happy in my life."

Gwynne walked about the large old-fashioned room with its bow-window, and alcove for the bed. He had half expected that the room he had so often passed with reluctant steps would be furnished in blue or pink, but it was as red as that of the traditional queen. Isabel had brought up all the old crimson damask curtains that had been fashionable in her grandmother's time, and covered the windows and walls of her bedroom, even the head of the mahogany four-poster in which her mother and herself had been born. The carpet was new, but a dull crimson,



like the faded hangings, and the dressing-table with its quantity of chased silver—one of the few inheritances she had managed to retain—was the only spot of light in the rather sombre room: it was all white muslin and bright crimson silk. There was an old-fashioned settle against the wall and three stiff chairs. Gwynne liked the room, and had a vague feeling that he knew Isabel a little better. Certainly it expressed a side of her of which he had caught but an occasional glimpse.

He pulled the curtains apart and shading his eyes from the light of the room looked down towards the city. It had vanished under a sea of white fog that broke against the ledge of Nob Hill. A cable-car might have been a comet flashing along the edge of a void.

"I wonder," he said, "I wonder—should San Francisco disappear—be burned by that fire you are always expecting—or if the bay should shoal, or the Golden Gate rush together, so that she would have no reason for existence, and gradually be devoured by time—I suppose the fog and the winds would still be faithful. I can imagine the fogs rolling in and embracing her, and the winds raging about every forgotten corner, centuries after there was anybody left to curse either."

"Was it Mrs. Kaye or Lady Cecilia Spence that said you just missed being a poet? I hope some slumbering ancestor is not struggling for resurrection out here. I much prefer that you should be a statesman."

"I intend to be, nor have I any desire to turn poet. I have seen too many in London. But this city, ugly as it is, appeals in its own way to the imagination—more, for some unknown reason, than the most poetic I ever saw in the old worlds. There is something almost uncanny about it.

While it is raw, and crude, and practically in its infancy, it at the same time suggests an unthinkable antiquity. Perhaps—who knows?—it had a civilization contemporary with the Montezumas—or with Atlantis; and it is the ghosts of old unrecorded peoples that linger and give one a fairly haunted feeling when one climbs these hills alone at night."

"Much better you keep your hand on your pistol and your eye out for foot-pads—and one dreamer in the family is enough. I hope I have not infected you."

She forsook her glowing image and looked at him inquisitively. He wandered about the room again and paused to look at a row of daguerreotypes on a shelf, dead and forgotten Belmonts.

"You do dream a good deal," he said. "Judging by your varying styles of beauty as well as other things, you must be possessed by a dozen different sorts of old Johnnies trying to mutter something up out of the dark."

"I'm going to be nothing but a dreamer for a whole week."

"If that means that you will forget chickens, and dress yourself decently, I shall do what I can to heighten the illusion. Should you like me to make love to you?" he asked, turning to her with a quickening interest.

"That might wake me up," said Isabel, politely. "This week is crowded with parties and things. I am to visit Mrs. Hofer and go to all of them. You won't see much of me until New Year's eve, when I come home and we dine at a Bohemian restaurant with Lyster and Paula, and watch the street crowds after. But I do not look so far ahead. If I am a success to-night I am going to make believe that I am an old-time belle like Helena Belmont, or my poor



little mother, for that matter. And I shall feel just like her when I start, for Angélique will pin up my skirts under a long cloak, and pull carriage boots over my slippers so that nothing will be spoiled going down those steps. I suppose I can't hope to be quite such a belle as if I had lived in those less-sophisticated days, but who knows? And I can forget Rosewater—and Bohemia; I sha'n't even think of the Stones until New Year's eve; I sent them their Christmas presents this morning, on purpose. I am going to be frivolous, coquette, and imagine myself a girl of the old Southern Set, when there were no new people. And I'm going to make them *think* I am a great beauty, whether I am or not. I remember mamma used to say to me: 'Cultivate the beauty air. That often is more effective than beauty itself. Tiny Montgomery was a beauty according to every known standard, but she had no dash, and was never looked at when Helena Belmont was in the room. So to-night, you'll see me sail into that ballroom as if I already had the town at my feet. By-the-way—the last time I began to feel like a real girl again was that night at Arcot—and I did feel eighteen—triumphant—happy—until I got back and saw Lord Zeal in the library. I have never forgotten his face."

"Nor have I," said Gwynne, dryly; but he turned pale. "I suppose you haven't had the least suspicion what he came to tell me that night?"

"I thought to say good-bye without letting you know—it isn't possible that he told you he intended to kill himself?"

"He told me a good deal more. He had shot Brathland. Murdered him, in plain English. You may fancy the night I had with him."

Isabel stared up at him, the radiance gone from her face.

"And you have been carrying that about in addition to everything else?"

"It was brutal to tell you this to-night! I can't imagine why I did, particularly as I have never told even my mother—who, like everybody else not necessarily in the secret, thinks that Zeal killed himself in despair over his failing health. But—yes, I remember that dress now—I rarely notice the details of women's clothes—but I remember admiring those blue lilies on that airy white stuff—I suppose you suddenly brought the whole thing back as vividly as if we were at Capheaton instead of out here on the edge of creation. You must forgive me and forget it."

"Yes I will! I'll forget everything for a week." She wheeled about and rubbed her cheeks. Gwynne stooped suddenly and kissed the little black mole on her shoulder.

"This is all I ask in return for the baubles," he murmured; and then as he met a blazing eye: "Could I do less than restore your lovely color? But I must fly and get into my togs."



XXXIII

THE old-fashioned interior of the Polk House, with on the lower floor, its double parlors connected by sliding doors, its narrow central hall, and its many shapeless rooms of varying size, had been entirely remodelled by the essentially modern Mrs. Hofer. Her husband had wished to build an imposing mass of shingles and stones, but Mrs. Hofer was far too impatient to wait a year—perhaps two, if there were strikes—to take up her abode on Nob Hill, and the Polk House was in the market. Perhaps something in the stolid uncompromising exterior of the old barrack appealed to her irresistibly, mausoleum that it was of an aristocratic past. But upon the interior she wasted no sentiment, and some half a million of her husband's dollars. There were now three great rooms on the lower floor and four small ones, besides a circular hall with a spiral marble stair. The drawing-room, which ran from east to west, was one of the most notable rooms in the country, had been the subject of violent controversy, newspaper and verbal, and was a perpetual delight to the dramatic soul of its mistress. The most original artist the State had produced had painted a deep frieze which was a series of the strange moonlight scenes that had made his fame: the deep sulphurous blue of the California night sky, the long black shadows, the wind-driven trees, the low desolate adobe houses aban-

doned in the towns settled by Spain. Now and again a cluster of lights indicated a window-pane and a belated tenant, but the garden walls were in ruins, the tiled roofs sagging, the ancient whitewash was peeling; all blended and lifted into a harmony of color and pathos by the genius of the artist. The expanse of dull green-blue walls of rough plaster below the frieze was unbroken; on the marble floor there were blue velvet rugs. The furniture was of ebony and dull-blue brocade. There was not even a picture on an easel, but there were several Rodins and Meuniers. At the lower or west end of the room the wall had been removed and replaced by a single immense pane of plate glass. From this window, always curtainless, there was a startling view of the steep drop of the hill, beetling with houses and steeples, Telegraph Hill beyond and a little to the north; then the bay, and the towns on its opposite rim. At night the scene, with its blue above and black below, picked out with a thousand lights—massed into a diadem beyond the bay—looked like a sublimation of the painter's work. Within, the cunningly arranged lights saved the room at all times from being too sombre, and were set to reveal every detail of paintings far too precious to have been recklessly lavished upon a wooden house in the most recklessly built of all great cities.

The dining-room—which had the proportions of a banqueting-hall, with an alcove for family use—was hung with tapestries and furnished with chairs lifted bodily from a castle in Spain; and it was a room in which no one would remember to look for ancestors. The library also commanded a view of the bay and had been decorated by native artists with imitations of the Giorgione frescoes,

charmingly pink and smudgy. The hangings and furniture were of royal crimson brocade, and the walls were covered with books. Mr. Toole, who was a scholar of the old-fashioned sort, of which California still holds so many, had selected the books; and the contents were as noteworthy as the bindings. In a special alcove was a large number of priceless Fourteenth and Sixteenth Century editions. From this sumptuous room curved an iron balcony, where the old gentleman might be seen sunning himself any fine day, his steel spectacles half-way down his nose, and a volume propped on the shelf of an easy-chair furnished with all the modern improvements.

On the white satin panels of the large round hall were a few of the most valuable old masters as yet brought to the country, but Mrs. Hofer, who was a patriot or nothing, did not hesitate to mix them with the best efforts of her fellow-citizens, nor to proclaim her preference for the native product. It was all very well to have old masters, and modern Europeans, if it was the thing, but she never felt quite at home with them, and liked her California inside as well as out.

The four little reception-rooms, or boudoirs, were so many cabinets for treasures, and on the night of the ball, like the rest of the rooms on this floor, were entirely without further adornment; only the white marble of the spiral stair was festooned with crimson roses; and the narrow hall that led from the rotunda to the new ballroom was dressed in imitation of a long arbor of grape-vines, and hung with clusters of hot-house grapes and Chinese lanterns. The ballroom had been built out from the back of the house upon the steep drop of the hill, and as even its graduated foundation did not lift it to the level of

the first floor, it was reached by a short flight of steps. For three months Mrs. Hofer's judicious hints had excited the curiosity of the town, and all that were not bedridden had presented themselves at as early an hour as self-respect would permit. Mrs. Hofer, to use her own phrase, had "turned herself loose," on this room, and even her husband, who had gasped at the sum total, indulgent as he was, admitted to-night that "she knew what she was about." The immense room was built to simulate a patio in Spain. The domed roof, in the blaze of light below, looked to be the dim blue vault of the night sky. The gallery that encircled the room was divided into balconies, and from them depended Gobelin tapestries, Eastern rugs, silken shawls—yellow embroidered with red, blue embroidered with white—after the manner of Spain on festa days. The background of the gallery was a mass of tropical plants alternating with latticed windows and long glass doors. Sitting with an arm or elbow on the railing, was every California woman of Mrs. Hofer's acquaintance that had the inherited right to wear a mantilla, a rose over her ear, and wield a large black fan; that is to say, those that were too old or too indifferent to dance. How Ada Hofer induced them to form a part of her decorations nobody ever knew, themselves least of all; but there, to the amazement and delight of the hundreds below, they were, and it was many years since the majority of them had looked so handsome. Beneath the balcony was an arcade where many seats were disposed among palms and pampas grass. The inevitable fountain was at the end of the room; it was of white stone, and colored lights played upon its foaming column. The musicians were in the gallery above it.



When Gwynne and Isabel descended the steps and stood looking down upon the scene for a moment, the younger people were dancing. Every woman seemed to have been fired with the ambition to contribute her own part to the brilliancy of the night. There were tiaras by the score in these days, and the gowns had journeyed half-way round the world. There had been imported gowns in the immortal Eighties, when Mrs. Yorba reigned, but never a tiara; and Isabel for the first time fully realized the significant changes worked by the vast modern fortunes and their ambitious owners. Blood might have been enough for their predecessors, but the outward and visible sign for them.

And all sets were represented to-night. It is doubtful if any woman had done as much to entice them to a common focus as the surmounting Mrs. Hofer. She was not the leader of San Francisco society, for that office was practically an elective one, and meant an infinite amount of trouble with corresponding perquisites; it must be held by a woman of supreme tact, experience, executive ability, and practically nothing else to do. The present incumbent, to the infinite credit of San Francisco, was a member of one of the oldest and most distinguished families in California; or in America, for that matter; and although still young, and with less to spend in a year than the Hofers wasted in a week, she had been chosen, after the death of the old leader, and some acrimonious discussion, to rule; and rule she did with a rod of iron. But she took her good where she found it, and was grateful for what Mrs. Hofer, with her beautiful house and irresistible energy had already accomplished. For Mrs. Hofer was by no means too democratic. If she had drawn all factions to

her house she had taken care that only the best of her own kind came too, and this best was very good indeed; for it was educated and accomplished, more often than not had mingled in society abroad; an honor to which many of the ancient aristocracy had never aspired. No one recognized this fact, and the irresistible law of progress, better than the Leader, in spite of her Spanish blood; and to-night she sat in the very centre of the north gallery, her charming dark face draped in a mantilla some two centuries old. Beside her sat Anne Montgomery who had not a drop of Spanish in her, but whom Mrs. Hofer had done up with a brand-new mantilla of white lace and an immense black fan. Miss Montgomery had a lingering sense of humor, but it suited her to look young and pretty once more, if only for a night. Mrs. Trennahan, who was really fond of Mrs. Hofer, particularly as she had been adroitly persuaded that this party was to be a mere setting for her lovely young daughter, also decorated the gallery in one of the old Yorba mantillas—it had belonged to the beautiful aunt for whom this house had been built by the husband she scorned—and wore it for the first time in her life. Trennahan had shaken with a fit of inward laughter, but had compelled his eyes to express only admiration and approval.

Other dowagers sat below, some bediamonded and others not: the "old Southern Set" lived on diminishing incomes; new industries were decreasing the values of the old. They had lost none of their pride, but philosophy had mellowed them, and they were honestly grateful for such splendid diversion; and Mrs. Hofer's suppers cost a small fortune, even in San Francisco. Their offspring cared as little for traditions as for supper, and had married

or were marrying into the newer sets, rapidly obliterating what lines were left. As for the new, they were legion, and not to be distinguished by the casual eye from those that traced their descent to the crumbling mansions of South Park and Rincon Hill; and they had the earnest co-operation of the best of the world's milliners. The pick of Bohemia was also present, those that were distinguishing themselves in art and letters, or even on the stage, for Mrs. Hofer had learned some of her lessons in London. All that were now looked upon as county families, spending as they did but one or two months of the year in the city, had come to town for this ball, but the country towns were represented only by Gwynne and Isabel and the Tom Coltons. The group of men so desperately interested in the municipal affairs of the city disliked and distrusted Colton; but Mrs. Leslie had been born on Rincon Hill, and all doors, old and new, were open to her daughter. Isabel caught a glimpse of Anabel among the dancers, in a gown of primrose satin almost the color of her hair, and a little diamond tiara made from some old stones of her mother's.

"Well!" exclaimed Isabel. "What do you think of us? Is it not a wonderful scene?"

Gwynne nodded. "All that is wanting is a background of caballeros in the gallery, silk and ruffles, and hair tied with ribbons. But I suppose the old gentlemen objected. There must be some limit to Mrs. Hofer's powers of persuasion. But—yes—it is a wonderful scene, and you are a wonderful people to take so much troub e."

The waltz finished and Mrs. Hofer bore down upon them. She wore white brocade, the flowers outlined with jewels, shimmering under a cloud of tulle, and her neck

and her fashionably dressed head were hardly to be seen for the rubies and diamonds that bound them. She was fairly palpitating with youth and triumph, and delight in the dance, and although without beauty or a patrician outline, there was no more radiant vision in the room. She reproached Isabel for being late, informed her that she had ordered all the best men to keep dances for her, summoned several, and then bore off Gwynne to introduce him to the prettiest of the girls. In a few moments Isabel was engaged for every dance before supper; she had given the *cotillon* to Gwynne.

She had realized immediately, that upon such a scene, with such a background, she could hope to make no such overwhelming impression as had fallen to the lot of Helena Belmont, surrounded by buff-colored walls and a small exclusive society—for the most part disdainful of dress. Nevertheless, she was soon pleasurably aware that she was the subject of much comment, not only in the gallery, but among the hundreds of smart young girls and women on the floor, the men that danced, and those that supported the walls. The old beaux, left over from the days when Nina Randolph and Guadalupe Hathaway had reigned, who had put the stamp of an almost incoherent approval upon the dazzling Helena, that famous night of her début, were dead and dust; but another group, including the quartet that had as promptly declared themselves the suitors and slaves of the exacting beauty, were present to-night, critically regarding the débutantes. Their comparisons were less impassioned than those of their old mentors, for they were tired; they had disposed of much of their superfluous enthusiasm in the increased difficulties of making an income, since the



brief reign of a heartless witch, whom they still remembered with an occasional pang of sentiment, but more gratitude that they had not had her as well as fortune to subdue. None had prospered exceedingly, but all had done well. They were still in their forties, but as gray as their fathers had been at sixty; indeed, looked older than Trennahan, who had disdained to add to his own and his wife's fortunes, and lived merely to enjoy life; and they would far rather have been in bed. But three of them were indulgent family men. Eugene Fort had clung to the single state, but the others were contributing one or more daughters to the evening's entertainment; and they had all drifted naturally together to discuss the new beauties before retreating to the haven at the top of the house where there was a billiard-table and much good whiskey and tobacco. They were disputing over the respective claims of Inez Trennahan, who was a replica of the California *Favoritas* of a century ago, and Catalina Over with the Indian blood on her high cheek-bones, and her mouth like an Indian's bow, when Isabel descended the stairs. They promptly gave her the palm, although they did not turn pale, nor lose their breath.

"The grand style," said Trennahan. "I wonder will the home-bred youth appreciate it? In your day she would have had a better chance, but most of these worthy young men, when they have been to college at all, have patronized Stanford or Berkeley; in other words, never been out of the State, and, no doubt, prefer the more vivid, frivolous, and essentially modern product."

"If it lay with us," said Alan Rush, sadly. "But it is as you say. She will frighten most of the young fellows. By Jove, she looks as if she had danced at Washington's first

ball. But that's it. Nothing free and easy, there. It's no longer the fashion to be too aristocratic."

But Isabel, if she did not create a *furore* among the young men, who would have thought such a performance beneath their dignity, was, at least, generally admitted to be "Pretty well as stunning a girl as you might see in a long day's journey," "a regular ripper," "the handsomest of the bunch," and as far as "mere looks went" the "pick of the lot." The girls viewed her with no great favor, but the majority of the women, especially those in the galleries, sustained the verdict of the men; and the Leader, in the course of the evening, descended and introduced herself, claimed relationship, and graciously intimated that if Isabel cared to join the *cotillon* clubs and the skating-rink—*The* skating-rink—an exclusive yet hospitable wing would be lifted. A younger brother of Mr. Hofer, who had also multiplied his paternal million, devoted himself to her seriously, and Gwynne, who soon had enough of dancing, gracefully renounced his claims to the german. They had one waltz together and then he did not see her again until the hour of departure, when he stood in the hall and watched her descend the winding white stair between the roses. He thought her a charming picture in her long white coat, with a lace scarf over her head, and her arms full of costly toys. When she reached his side she ordered him to put her favors into the pockets of his overcoat, and keep his hand on his pistol, as she would not risk losing one of them, much less her jewels. Her eyes were very bright, and her cheeks deeply flushed, but were the cause a fully satisfied ambition, he could only guess.



XXXIV

THE hour was four, and after they had said their last good-night to the guests whose homes lay between the Hofer mansion and their own, they met but one foot passenger as belated as themselves. This was a big man that loomed suddenly out of the fog. Isabel screamed and ran into the middle of the street, and Gwynne, who had obediently taken out his pistol, half raised it. But the man laughed.

"I'm on the lookout for thim meself," he said, in a rich brogue. "Good luck to yees."

As they let themselves into the house, Gwynne threw his hat and coat on the settle in the vestibule, and then ran his hand through his hair and rubbed the back of his head, a habit of his when he had a suggestion to make.

"I remember we were going to sit up the rest of that night—or morning—after Arcot," he said. "Are you very tired?"

"Tired? I shall not sleep a wink for hours. The fire is sure to be laid in the tower-room."

They went into the small circular room, furnished in several shades of green, that Isabel had retained for her own use, and while she shook down her skirts Gwynne applied a match to the coals. The raw morning air had penetrated the house, too old-fashioned to have a furnace, but wooden walls are quickly heated. When Gwynne

had removed the blower several times and satisfied himself that the hard coals would burn, he resumed the perpendicular.

He looked doubtfully at Isabel, who was still wrapped in her cloak, and had elevated her feet, covered with the long carriage-boots, to the fender. "Sha'n't you take off those things?" he asked. "You don't look as if you meant to stay."

"You can take off the boots, but I'll keep on my coat for a few moments."

He laughed as he knelt again. "I certainly am getting broken in. I have known Englishwomen to pull off their husband's hunting-boots after a hard day's work—"

"The idea!"

"Very good idea. Do you mean that you would not?"

"Well, I might, as a return favor. You need not take all night to pull off mine."

"You might, at least, let virtue be its own reward. It's not often it has the chance."

"Well, get up and don't be an idiot. I suppose you have been flirting in the conservatory all the evening and haven't had time to readjust your mood."

"Mrs. Hofer has no conservatory. Great oversight. But I did sit out a dance or two in that room with the immense window—"

"With whom?"

"I have forgotten her name. Will you have a cigarette?"

"No, but you may smoke if you like."

He had settled himself in a deep chair on the opposite side of the hearth. There was a silence of nearly ten minutes, until Isabel, suddenly removing her coat, brought Gwynne out of his reverie.

"I cannot say that to-night was in any sense a repetition of my own experience at Arcot," he said, abruptly. "That night—I have tried to forget it—I had enough adulation to turn any man's head. I fancy it *was* pretty well turned, and that made the wrench during the small hours the more severe. Still, it has been an interesting evening, and one or two things happened."

"What?" Isabel was full of her own experiences, but too much of a woman to betray the fact when a man wanted to talk about himself.

"I danced for a while, but I had had exercise enough during the day, and didn't care particularly about it. Besides, all the girls I danced with, and that one I sat up-stairs with for a few minutes, not only talked my head off, but quizzed me, and I did not understand it. To my amazement, I learned not long after that they know who I am. Can you imagine how it got out?"

"They know everything. It is an old saying that the San Francisco girls scent a stranger the moment he leaves the train at the Oakland mole, and know all about him before he has registered. The obscurest knight could not hide himself in this town. Rosewater alone saved you so long. How did they quiz you?"

"Each began at once to talk about my 'distinguished relative, Elton Gwynne.' I may be more dense than most, or perhaps I was merely bored, but I assumed that they thought I was his brother and knew his whereabouts. When supper was half over, and I was congratulating myself that I had got out of the *cotillon*, even with you, for it meant dancing with a lot of others, my host took me firmly by the arm and marched me up-stairs. He informed me that he was 'bored stiff,' could see that I was,

and had 'coralled' a few more choice spirits. We went, not to the smoking or billiard-room, but to his own bedroom, and here I found four or five more of your strenuous millionaires, the reform editor, and the lawyer that looks like a bull-dog waiting for the word to spring at the throat of the Boss and his whole vile crew.

"Here we sat and smoked until the air inside was as thick as the fog that blotted out the lights of the city and towns opposite. Of course the talk was of the rotten state of San Francisco. I never heard the whole story before, and it made my hair stand on end. I knew that vice flaunted itself more openly here than elsewhere, but I did not guess that the thousand and one establishments of every sort, from the lowest negro dive under the sidewalk, and the snares for the very young of both sexes, straight up to the most gaudy 'French restaurants,' as well as Chinatown, Barbary coast, and all the rest, paid tribute to the gang of political ruffians that have got control of the city. No wonder the last have developed a preternatural sharpness that makes it next to impossible to bring the charges home, for they will all be rich enough in time to move to Europe and buy up such salable scions of improverished houses as happen to be on the market. The thing is as well known as I know that you are my third cousin, but, although the second-rate grafters are brazen enough, it is not worth while to attack them until the Boss is done for, and so far he has proved much too clever to be caught. A college man, although of low origin, and an accomplished lawyer of a sort, he pockets huge sums from these disreputable establishments, for himself and his minion, the mayor, and calls them attorney's fees. Naturally the panderers to vice won't admit they are blackmailed: they

are between the devil and the deep sea; if the fight came on in earnest, and they gave evidence against the Boss, and the Boss won, he would clean them all out and put others in. The Reformers, if they won, would clean them out too; so, naturally, they hold their tongues and hope this reform movement will peter out as so many others have done. So do the Board of Supervisors whom the Boss also owns and through whom he blackmails the great corporations. But—and when they had got to this point in the talk there was an abrupt pause, and then Hofer turned to me and said: 'Even if you don't come in and join us, which I always hope you will do, I know a man that can keep his mouth shut when I see him. So fire away.'

"And then they discussed the fact that one of their number had recently gone to Washington to ask the President to send out an able man of the Government Secret Service; they have every reason to believe that this request will be complied with. With sufficient evidence they would then make a quiet crusade in the hope of rousing public spirit to the extent of forcing in a grand jury that could not be bought by the Boss. Needless to say he has controlled every grand jury that has met during his reign, and one might as well hope to convict a wind for unroofing a house, even were he not master of every legal trick himself, and had he taken less pains to cover up his tracks. In this detective lies their chief hope at present; but what a slender hope it is, when you consider the devil-may-care character of these San Franciscans, who would dance on the edge of hell, with equal nonchalance, if only there were a screen between. There is not an outstanding excuse for forming a vigilance committee, as there was during the Dennis Kearney-Anti-Chinese riots of 1879,

and there is no such aroused public spirit and indignation as sustained the Vigilantes of the Fifties. These rascals take good care to be non-sensational in their methods, and what the San Franciscan doesn't see doesn't worry him. The city is rich, prosperous, famous, tourists are pouring in, the best in drama and opera comes yearly—to be presented in fire-traps whose owners pay toll to the Boss; they already have the handsomest hotels in the world, the finest cooking, climate; even earthquakes—severe ones—have moved elsewhere. What can you do with a people like that? They are fairly insolent in their sense of security. Let the political gang make their share. There is enough for all. But don't bother us. Let us be happy. *Vive la bagatelle.* There you have the motto of San Francisco.

"By the time they had threshed the subject out, explaining details and plans to me, as if I were already one of them, I was feeling pretty uncomfortable. Naturally, I blurted out that I could no longer accept their hospitality and confidence on false pretences, and told them who I was. Each got up in turn, solemnly held out his hand, and said, 'Shake.' Then Hofer informed me that they had all been practically certain for some time that I was myself; being good enough to add: 'We knew there couldn't be more than one of you; and we are also able to put two and two together, occasionally. Before we thought of it, however, you struck us all as being a man accustomed to homage. Later we discovered that you were choke full of seven different kinds of ability, and it was then that the twos began to move towards each other on the board; and we decided that we must have you here, right here in San Francisco. What can a man like you find in a God-for-

saken place like Rosewater, anyhow? The Eggopolis! You can't afford to hail from there; it would stick to you for the rest of your life. And we have just got to have you. We may have some of the ablest lawyers in the country in San Francisco, and a few honest ones, but we can accommodate one more; and a man that will throw over a great title and an already won name for the sake of standing on his own legs—that's the sort of stuff the old pioneers were made of. So, here you must come, and stand shoulder to shoulder with us.'

"I replied that I must finish my law studies with Judge Leslie first, and have some little practice under his direction; that I intended to go in for politics, but that for some years all the power over men I could acquire would be through the law—and I had remarkable chances for contact in and about Rosewater; where, moreover, if they learned who I was it would not matter much. It might be quite otherwise in the city. To this they agreed: that is to say, that I should remain in Rosewater for six months or a year longer; but they asked me to promise that if any great emergency arose, in which they believed I could be of use, I would come at their call. And I promised."

He rose and moved restlessly about the room. "Upon my word!" he exclaimed; and Isabel, who had not taken her eyes off him, although he had addressed the greater part of his talk to the fire, noted that he was paler than usual—and that his eyes were very bright; "upon my word, I really do feel more elated than on that night at Arcot. That small devoted band of men!—most of them with millions they might take to the most civilized capitals of the world and spend in splendid enjoyment—I never have met such patriotism! It is magnificent! And to

find it out here in this stranded city—that fascinates the very heart out of you, by-the-way—I don't know that I wonder so much—I believe I shall succumb myself in time—it is like being on another planet. At any rate I hated myself to-night for any sickness of spirit I may have permitted to linger—for a while my very personality seemed to melt into what may prove an even greater cause than all that appears on the surface. The present California may be merely the nucleus of a great future Western civilization, so unlike the Eastern that no doubt it will dissever itself in time and breed still wider divergences; until the old generic term American will no longer apply to both. Moreover, it already feels that it owns the Pacific, and faces the Orient alone. And to rebuild this city—you have seen the Burnham plans—transform it into the most beautiful city of the modern world—to give it a great, instead of a merely brilliant and erratic civilization—a perfect administration—what dreamers! What imagination! It is an inspiration to come into contact with an idealism that money, and power, and daily contact with the mean and base in human nature—"

"I could love you!" cried Isabel. "If you say any more, I believe I shall kiss you again."

"If you do," said Gwynne, deliberately, "I shall neither pinch you nor push you away. But you may regret it, nevertheless."

He threw himself once more into his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. "It is an astonishing fact," he said—"This—I was reading the history of the Kearney riots, only the other day. The commentator was very severe on the Irish and German element that imperilled the city for purely personal reasons; that was responsible

for the most remarkable and reprehensible of all the State Constitutions. That was not quite thirty years ago. Whether any of these men, who are mainly of Irish or German descent, are the sons or grandsons of any of those old Sand-lot agitators I have no means of knowing; probably not, their fortunes were no doubt already in the making, and the founders had graduated from the class that went to sand-lot meetings and shouted, 'The Chinese must go.' But it is certainly one of the oddest evolutions in history that it should be the descendants of that foreign element alone that take any real interest in this city; that are ardent to reform it, beautify it; that are willing to devote their time and a good part of their fortunes to that end. So far, although I have met in the clubs many old gentlemen of charming manners and prehistoric descent—that is from '49, or even the more pretentious East and South; and, at all sorts of places, their sons—who are either building up new fortunes or spending old ones—there is not one, so far as my observation serves me, that has lifted a finger to fling off this octopus. Hofer says they have even ceased to grumble. Their incomes are assured. Some are merely well off, others immensely wealthy—with a sufficiency invested elsewhere. All can command about the same amount of luxury, however their establishments may vary in splendor. And nothing can exceed the luxury of their Clubs. The older men at least—and they are not so old—have subsided into a slothful content that makes them a cross between a higher sort of carnivorous animal and the tacit supporters of the criminals in power. These friends of mine, whose fathers may or may not have listened to Kearney in the Sand-lots, are worth the whole lot of your ancient aristocracy—hybrid, anyhow—and if I



do 'hang out my shingle' here in San Francisco, they are the only ones I care anything about knowing. They are the only real Americans I have met, for that matter—according to your own standards—" He broke off abruptly and leaned forward, smiling at his companion. "I meant to ask you as soon as we got home to tell me all about your first great party in your beloved city, but I have been led away by my natural egotism. You were, by general acclaim, I fancy, the beauty of the evening. Did you enjoy it all as much as you expected?"

"I fancy I should have enjoyed it more if I had been upstairs with you. I found it more of an effort than I had imagined to make conversation with those young men. Of course I enjoyed being openly admired and besought for dances. Who wouldn't? But I never deluded myself for a moment that I was anything approaching those old-time belles. As the conditions have passed away, however, my vanity doesn't suffer. At all events I am going to carry out my program and rush about to everything that is given this week, to forget Rosewater, every aspiration, all that ever happened to me. Every girl should have one girl's good time, and although mine is belated, it would be silly to let it pass. Besides, I am curious to see if I really can—well, delude myself."

"So am I! I have an idea you won't. You are quite different from all those girls, who are at the same time the brightest and the most frivolous, the most feminine and the most modern, the most daring and the most indifferent, I have ever met. Those that have been as carefully brought up as our ninetieth cousin, Inez Trennahan, are simply moulds for the future to run into. There were several young persons that looked as if they might go

pretty far in a conservatory—perhaps that is the reason Mrs. Hofer has none. She appears to have Irish virtue in excess, and I expect the larky would get short shrift from her. But you—you are quite unlike them all."

"I am a Californian," said Isabel, defiantly.

"Yes, but of a very exclusive sort—to say nothing of the peculiar circumstances that were bound to breed seriousness of mind. And you have quite a distinguished collection of real ancestors, and intellect instead of mere cleverness. It is only once in a while that your—let me whisper it—Western frankness and ingenuousness leap out—the impulsiveness, the electric passion. When a certain amount of readjustment has gone on inside of you and your more natural elements work their way up and take possession, I really believe I shall fall in love with you, and marry you out of hand—if you remain as beautiful as you are to-night."

"All right," said Isabel, pretending to stifle a yawn. "That would be interesting. All the clocks are booming something. Let us go out and see if the sun is rising."

She wrapped herself in her cloak once more, and they climbed to the crest of the hill and watched the sun rise behind the Berkeley mountains and bathe San Francisco in trembling fire. It routed what was left of the fog, although for a time the walls and waters of the Golden Gate looked darker than before, and Tamalpais was a mountain of onyx. In a few moments the smoke that wrapped the San Francisco day in a brown perpetual haze began to ascend first from the little chimneys and then from the great stacks. But until then every steeple, every tower, the great piles of stone and brick in the valley, the old gardens full of eucalyptus-trees and weeping willows, the

strange assortment of architectures on Nob Hill, even the rows of houses on the tapering half-circle of hills beyond the valley, miles away, stood out as bright and sharp and shadowless as if caught and imprisoned in a crystal ball. It was the drifting smoke that seemed to bind all together and make the city fit for humanity.

Gwynne pointed to a spot far to the southeast, in the valley between Market Street—the wide diagonal highway that cut the city in two, and ran from the ferries almost to the foot of Twin Peaks—and the high mound known as Rincon Hill. "There, he said "are the hovels and shops that cover the block belong ng to my mother and myself, and that is to make us rich. Half is practically sold, and the proceeds, and the money raised on the other half, will erect a building that is to cost some two hundred thousand dollars. The insurance rates will be enormous, but even so the income should be really a great one. If all goes well, the foundations—of reinforced concrete, although they still laugh at earthquakes—but Mr. Colton is a monster of caution—will be laid in about six weeks, and then I shall watch the steel framework rise with a very considerable interest."

"That means the beginnings of a millionaire. Do you really care so much to be rich?"

"I know the value of money," said Gwynne, dryly. "I have no intention of buying men after the fashion of your friend Tom Colton, but it is a mighty good background for personality. Now you had better go in and get some beauty sleep."



XXXV

MISS MONTGOMERY called as Isabel and Gwynne were sitting down to luncheon at two o'clock. She was not in the best of tempers, for she had renewed her youth briefly the night before, her old admirers had shown her much gallant attention, and if she had gone home with a song in her heart and a flame in her eyes, she had been but the more conscious of the wooden spoon upon awakening. She had risen with no very keen regret for her vanished claims upon men long since married and consoled, for she had never been what is called a marrying girl, but with her mind inclined to gloomy meditation upon lost opportunities far more dear. She had never ceased to believe that, the fates conspiring, she might have become one of the great musicians of the world; for although she was willing to admit the defect of will that had reduced her to the ranks, she had not grasped the historic fact that the born artist accomplishes his fulfilment in spite of all obstacles, imagined or real. Her obstacles had been purely sentimental, for her family were commonplace selfish people not worth considering, and, her endowment being just short of distinguished, a misplaced sense of duty and the stultifying influences of her home were responsible for her profession as caterer at the age of thirty-six. Her people had belonged to the type that held in aristocratic disgust the "woman who did things," "showed herself to

the public"; moreover, as Isabel had told Gwynne, they worshipped the flower-like artistic young creature, and would let neither the world nor man have aught of her. She was twenty-eight when her family died, and knowing that as a music-teacher she could not hope to compete with finished instructors, she had looked over her other talents and found that the only one which promised immediate returns was a certain knack for sauces and sweets. All her friends rushed to her assistance, and while broiling over a hot stove, stirring jam, wished that dear Anne were not so proud and would accept a check without any fuss. But Miss Montgomery quickly graduated from this amateur stage. She set herself deliberately to work to become a *chef*, and, from offerings to the Womans' Exchange, she was soon supplying choice dishes for luncheons, and finally entire dinners. She had a warm friend in the then Leader of San Francisco Society, and her own cleverness and indomitable perseverance did the rest. She sometimes reflected that if she had found the iron in her nature sooner she might have been fiddling in Vienna; but perhaps her highest gift had really been culinary, perhaps she needed the enthusiastic encouragement which she found on all sides when she embraced that appealing art; at all events she succeeded, was educating a promising orphan relative, and laying by for her old age. Another friend, no doubt, was the massive family silver which had escaped the wreck. Many of the new people, Mrs. Hofer among others, did not care for the responsibility of a luxury so tempting to thieves, and for which they had no innate predilection; they were more than willing to pay a reasonable sum for ancestral decorations upon state occasions, and to dine from artistic plated

ware meanwhiles. Not but that there was a sufficiency of solid bullion to be seen on many a San Francisco table, and there were several golden services in the city; but rich people have all sorts of economical kinks, and Miss Montgomery found this one profitable. Another thing, no doubt, that had contributed to her success, was the business-like attitude she had assumed as soon as she felt herself a professional. She accompanied her refections to the kitchen door, although the front was always open to her, and philosophically pocketed the customary tip.

And she had struggled valiantly against becoming an embittered old maid; in the main, had succeeded. To the world, at least, she rarely turned a scowl, and she had never lost a friend. But there were times when she hated her parents. Since Isabel's return she had had more than one rebellious hour, for Isabel had taken her life in both hands, snapped her fingers at restraints and small conventions, and, so far, at least, had made good. And the younger girl's development, to one that had known her always, was extraordinary. On the other hand, she exulted in the prospect of a member of the old set coming prominently to the front once more. She had spent a week with Isabel at Old Inn, and received a certain measure of confidence. She hoped that Isabel would really make a fortune, and urged her to follow Gwynne's example and put up a modern building on her San Francisco property. Money was easy to raise, for change and improvement possessed San Franciscans like an epidemic, and few but were not anxious to convert "South of Market Street" into a great business district. Although she was grateful to the new people, particularly Ada Hofer, who, to use the

lady's own expression "made things hum," in her heart she disliked the breed, and deeply resented the fact that the old set, even those by no means impoverished, to-day formed little more than a background. They were to be seen everywhere, they were still a power in a way, but they were by no means prosilient. Therefore, as she sat in the old dark dining-room on Russian Hill and listened to Isabel's praise of the interest that Hofer and his set took in the political and artistic regeneration of the city, she was moved to break out tartly:

"Are you giving them credit for altruism? They have their millions invested here, naturally they crave a reasonable prospect of retaining them—also of increasing them by filling Fairmont, and other projected caravansaries for the rich, with winter tourists from the East; possibly Europe. They not only fear the corporation cormorants—whom they can never reach so long as the Board of Supervisors is controlled by the Boss—the Boss himself and all his devouring horde, but the greatest menace of all: that San Francisco will in time, and before very long, be owned body and soul by the labor-unions. Then, even if they managed to save their wealth, the city would be intolerable for the socially ambitious or even the merely refined."

"You are unfair," said Gwynne; "for these men all have enough to pull out and invest elsewhere. They could go to New York and buy a big position, as so many of their predecessors have done. Or to London. Of course no man ever lived that was wholly disinterested, unless he was a fanatic, but it is vastly to the credit of these men that they love their own city, stand by it—determined to make it livable, not only for themselves, but for future genera-

tions; instead of moving away and becoming millionaires of leisure."

"Oh yes, I don't deny that they have enthusiasm—the remnant, no doubt, of what in their European ancestors was temperament. Americans don't have temperament. Or if we have we are far too self-conscious to show it. In the East it has been quite eradicated. Out here where gambling is still in the blood—and that blood is mixed—where the air is full of electricity, and the very ground under your feet none too certain, we are a little more primitive; we have an excitability that makes strangers find us more like the Latin races of Europe than our relatives beyond the Rockies. And although the set you admire does not drink, nor live the all-night life, it has its own demands for spice and variety, and its own ways of gratifying them. Love of change, love of any sort of a fight, is in the blood of your true Californian—particularly here in San Francisco, where all the great gambling fevers, from the days of '49 to the wild speculations in Virginia City stocks in '76, have raged up and out. Your friends are merely playing a big game. Successive defeats, and the formidable front of the enemy, make it the more stimulating. They have that fanatical love of San Francisco that every one out here has who doesn't hate it, and they find it more exciting to stay here and gamble for big stakes than to watch their wives spend money in New York, and console them for snubs. Another point—they are far more enterprising than the rich men's sons that preceded this generation—or set, rather. They keep on making money, you may have observed. And fashions change. New York Society is no longer the Mecca of the worldly San Franciscan, and it has also become the fashion

to invest huge amounts here; in many cases, entire fortunes. These men really could not pull out without great loss of income, and they all know how safe it is to leave one's interests in other people's hands. In this town, at least, no one has ever done that without regretting it."

"If the fashion has changed I dare say it is these men that have changed it. I always bow to feminine logic, but nothing you have said so far has changed my attitude. Besides, I admire their taste. This is the only part of America that has made any appeal to me, and there is no question that if they force through the Burnham plans, this city, with its wonderful natural advantages, will be as beautiful as ancient Athens. Surely you must admit ideality in men that can conceive such an ideal and cling to it, no matter how forlorn the hope."

"That's just what I object to. The least imaginative of us realizes that nature gave San Francisco a beautiful face and that man has done all he could to scar it. But even did these men obtain control—which they can't short of lynch law—it would take half a century to remove the old city piecemeal. Do you imagine property-owners are going to change their natures and sacrifice profitable office buildings and shops for the sake of widening streets and making boulevards and parks? Do you realize what it would mean in the way of individual sacrifice to build winding roads about these hills instead of the improved and perpendicular gullies we have to-day? Not even your own would do it. They merely dream and talk, although, no doubt, they would make all the changes that promised large personal profits. I suspect that the secret of their zeal is the desire to deflect the tourist tide from south to north."

Gwynne laughed. He was a stubborn idealist, and having found something at last to admire he purposed to hug it. "You belong to the pessimistic camp. I discovered that when you honored Old Inn. And I have lived here long enough to learn that it is full enough. But you are all different from other Americans, and for that reason I find the most discontented of you interesting."

But Miss Montgomery suspected that he was quizzing her and would not be drawn further. Instead, she proposed a walk, and Gwynne in his turn suggested that they go over and look at his property, which he had visited once only. Miss Montgomery knew the history of every house old and new, and told them many anecdotes as they walked down the steep hills or along the cross streets to Kearney, at the base. The new houses had fine gardens, the old ones were gloomy with eucalypti, or ragged with palms, but everywhere were flowers, even at this season, giving an immediate relief to the eye from the long dull perspective. On six days out of the seven the streets were torn with wind when they were not drenched with rain, and in the dry season the dust was intolerable; although San Franciscans vowed it was a part of the picture and missed it when abroad. But gay as certain sections of San Francisco was at night, its residence districts always had a deserted air, and on Sunday nothing could exceed the brown desolation of the shopping streets. From a variety of causes San Franciscans were averse from too much pedestrianism, and one could walk for blocks and pass nothing but an occasional carriage, or the trolley-cars shrieking up and down the hills, or emptying themselves into Kearney and Montgomery streets with the racket of a besieging army.

But this Christmas Day it was clear and warm, and the wind drifted about as if its wings were tired. All the world was on the cable and trolley cars, but bound for park and sea, and in the opposite direction from the three on their way to the valley south of Market Street. Kearney Street would have looked like a necropolis had it not been for several patient horses standing with their feet on the pavement, their ears cocked towards a saloon, or establishment for "rifle practice"; and even Market Street, on week-days barely passable with its trucks, four lines of cars, and a mass of humanity, was almost deserted. They walked past the Palace Hotel, down Second Street, and by many dingy peeling low-browed and entirely hideous shops and flats, with glimpses into unsavory cross streets, until they came to the block owned by the Otises since the early Fifties. Even in its present condition the rents were considerable, and as it was but a stone's-throw from several other new office buildings, there was no question that in the course of a few years the land value would be doubled, and Gwynne regretted being forced to sell a portion of his share in order to be able to erect a building large enough to pay. What was left of Hiram Otis's portion, inherited by Isabel, stood on the opposite corner, and now yielded only ground rent, the old buildings having crumbled on the stock-market. But the land could be sold conditionally, and once more Miss Montgomery suggested building. Gwynne turned to Isabel with interest.

"Do!" he exclaimed. "Come in with us, and we'll put up a larger building. Sell your land and I'll borrow money on one of the ranches, and sell out my Consols. Then I can hold on to all this, and we'll none of us have so long to wait for large returns."

"I am afraid of fires," said Isabel, dubiously. "The most vivid memories of my childhood are standing at my window on the Hill in my night-gown and watching whole blocks down here in flames. The wonder is that yours have never gone. Now I get my ground rent, no matter what happens." But before she had finished speaking she had made a sudden movement towards Gwynne. "I will do it," she said. "It will be better—all round."

"Good! And I intend to put on outside shutters of asbestos, so, with walls of concrete and steel, and as little wood inside as possible, we should weather anything short of subterranean fires."

Then Miss Montgomery took them through South Park, the oval enclosure, surrounded by high brown sad-looking houses looking down upon a bit of dusty green, and pointed out the long-deserted mansions of the Randolphs, the Hathaways, the Hunt McLanes, and of others who had dispensed the simple lavish hospitality of the Fifties and Sixties. She was intensely proud of the fact that her mother had been born in South Park, and pointed with a sigh, not all unconscious affectation, to the stiff three-storied house that had come, with so many others, "round the Horn" in the Fifties. Beside it, looking like an old man with his arms hanging and his jaw fallen, its windows vacant and broken, its paint long unrenewed, and cob-webs on the very doorstep, stood the Randolph House, the theatre of the most poignant of all an Francisco's initial tragedies. Isabel had told Gwynne the story of Nina Randolph, and as Anne repeated it he recalled the name of Dudley Thorpe, and remembered that he had left the reputation of a good parliamentarian and M. F. H.

They went up to Rincon Hill, once the haughty elder

sister of South Park, now looking like a lonely island in a dirty sea covered with wreckage. There still remained several handsome old ivy-covered mansions, and many beautiful as well as picturesquely dilapidated gardens. Rincon Hill had contributed two peeresses to England, Lee Tarlton and Tiny Montgomery, and Gwynne not only knew them both, but was the more interested, as Cecil Maundrell's sudden elevation to the earldom of Barnstaple during his active youth had served as an object-lesson to himself. Mrs. Montgomery's old home was in good repair but she was in Europe as usual, and Randolph Montgomery, now in the diplomatic service—too independent for the machine, he had been driven out of politics some years since—preferred the more central comforts of a hotel when he visited San Francisco. Two old family servants were sunning themselves in the garden. The window-curtains were presumably packed in camphor, and the dim panes suggested a cobwebbed and desolate interior. Gwynne glanced across the ugly shabby but teeming valley to the symbols of stupendous energies concentrated on its edge, and the variegated magnificence of the hills, piling like roughly terraced cliffs above it; then west to the mountains by the sea, green, unclaimed by man as yet, although the dead were thick on the hills just below. It was a city struggling out of chaos, but perhaps more interesting than it would be a century hence, when it had fulfilled its destiny and become a great metropolis of white marble and stone. A century? Nowhere had era succeeded era with such startling rapidity, nowhere in one short half-century had the genus American passed through so many phases. The evidences were all before him. Once again he had the impression of standing in the presence of hoary

age—ugly premature age—was that the secret of the vague suggestion of an unthinkable antiquity that so often rose like a ghost in his mind?

The girls announced that they should ride back, and they walked over and took a Third Street car. It was almost empty when they entered, but was invaded at the next corner by a belated pleasure party bound for the Park, a noisy disreputable crowd of flashy men, and girls with bold tired eyes, a thick coat of the white paint which has made the fortune of the San Francisco chemist, and gaudy cheap attire. Known in the vernacular as "chippies," they bore a crude Western resemblance to the Parisian grisette, and what they lacked in style they made up in sound. They were the class that monopolized boats and trains on Sundays, screaming steadily through the tunnels, and returned late, no longer happy because no longer able to make a noise. One of the young women pointed a finger at Gwynne, screaming, "I choose you!" and plumped herself on his lap, to the suppressed delight of Isabel and Miss Montgomery. But Gwynne looked blankly at her ill-buttoned back and the immense buckle of her belt, while the rest of the party, those that sat and those that swung to and fro at the straps, mocked her for choosing so unresponsive a knight. The car stopped to accommodate another relay, and Gwynne by a deft movement transferred the lady to his own seat, and engineered the girls out of the car, before two hoodlums, who were working their way up from the lower door, could reach them.

They found a garage and a good automobile, and spent an hour or two out on the ocean boulevard. When they returned to town, Miss Montgomery alighted at one of the hotels where she was to dine; and, the chauffeur an-

announcing that he could not "make another hill," Gwynne and Isabel started for home on foot.

The city rose in a succession of hills from the level, and they climbed slowly, talking little. Suddenly Gwynne laid his hand on Isabel's arm and stopped, directing her gaze upward. They were at the foot of one of the narrow almost perpendicular blocks that rose between Pine and California streets. On either side were brown old-fashioned houses, several of them set back from the street, and surrounded by trees and high close fences. It was almost dark, but a moon was due, so the street lamps were not lit. Crawling down from the street above, on one side only, and clinging to the upper houses, was the advance guard of the fog. It had come in stealthily and halted for a moment, taking strange shapes. It looked like the ghost of an ancient fog, and the very houses, in which not a light had appeared, might have been deserted for a century. In a moment it began to crawl down the side of the street, seeming to fill the whole city with silence. It was a scene indescribably gloomy, haunting, forbidding, and to Gwynne, who had studied the city in many lonely rambles, to whisper of the unrelieved gloom of lives behind that stage where the most famous of American Follies danced for ever in her cap and bells. The spirit of sympathy was in the fog and the brief darkness for the thousands of broken dogged men and women that rarely caught sight of the cap and bells. For them the ashes, the embittered memories, the blasted hopes, a quiet sullen hatred for the city that had devoured their hearts and left them automatons. This was a phase of the city's life of which the enthusiastic shallow tourist had never a hint. It took a man of genius like Gwynne



to feel the genius of the city in all its sinister variety. He had hardly pieced his impressions together as yet, but he told Isabel a little of what his subconscious ego had formulated, and she had never liked him so well as when she took his arm and they ascended into the sudden downrush of the fog.

XXXVI

GWYNNE returned to Lumalitas on the following day and Isabel moved down to Mrs. Hofer's. This had seemed a rather superfluous proceeding to Miss Otis, but Mrs. Hofer would take no denial, and lodged her guest in a suite the luxury of which at first delighted and then stifled her. She liked splendor and luxury in the abstract, but some lingering shade of Puritanism in her resented the enthralment of the higher faculties. Her rooms were upholstered with satin from floor to ceiling, the toilet-table was bedecked with gold, and the furniture had been made for some favorite of Napoleon during the First Empire. Isabel was haunted by a vague sense of impropriety, which she ridiculed but could not stifle.

And for the first time in her life she became weary of flowers. When she arrived there was an abundance of the more costly in her boudoir—those that were raised in hot-houses that the rich might not be balked in their laudable desire to spend—and before the week was over, her rooms, as she wrote to Gwynne—chuckling on his veranda—looked like a florist's shop and smelt like a funeral. Everybody she met, and several that she did not, sent her the floral tribute. The bell rang every hour. When the imperturbable footman finally appeared with a box that looked like a child's coffin, Isabel told him pettishly to throw it into the back yard. All Americans

send flowers to a pretty girl as a matter of course, but the San Franciscan indulges in an avalanche where his more economical Eastern brother is content with good measure, pressed down, but not running over.

But the offerings were by no means confined to the young men that Isabel met at the functions of the week. "Old friends of the family" were interested to welcome to their midst the beautiful daughter (albeit somewhat eccentric) of Jim Otis and Mary Belmont. Enthusiastic maidens, and others—anxious to proclaim their delight in this sudden invasion of their preserves—sent roses with stems four feet long and chrysanthemums that looked like painted cauliflowers. After a tea at the Presidio, given in the open square, and in honor of the descendant of its most historic Commandante, Don José Argüello, that reclaimed precinct being singularly prolific in flowers, the offerings arrived on the following day in an ambulance.

It was an energetic week. When Mrs. Hofer was not herself entertaining, she and her guest lunched and dined out daily, attended several teas every afternoon, a *cotillon*, a skating masque, and five balls. Two of the luncheons were at Burlingame and Menlo Park, whence they motored as valiantly as if the roads were European. How so much was crowded into one short week Isabel never understood, but finally came to the conclusion that the rush at its worst was better than remaining for two consecutive waking hours in the Hofer mansion. Mrs. Hofer was always amiable and charming, but she was overwhelming. Her energies demanded the safety-valve of constant speech, and she was one of those American hostesses that hold that to neglect a guest is an unpardonable breach of hospitality. She even gave up bridge for the week. Moreover, Isabel

was not long discovering that she contributed her part towards the sustenance of that wondrous buoyancy, those eternal high spirits, that glorious *joie de vivre*. The woman was an unconscious vampire. Men did not feel it, and saw only her irresistible youth, but she squeezed women as she did her morning sponge, and had no real intimates; although few, herself least of all, understood the secret. If she had liked Isabel less, it would have been more endurable, but she had never liked any one more, to say nothing of the fact that she was determined to give her "the time of her life." She descended upon her helpless guest with a rush of silken skirts—that sounded like wings—and a torrent of bright chatter, during every unoccupied hour or moment. Isabel's only experience of hospitality heretofore had been in England, where a guest might die and be resurrected between the formal hours of reunion and the hostess be none the wiser. It had never occurred to her that visiting might become hard labor, and as she had met few people whom she had liked as spontaneously as Ada Hofer, she had come to her without a misgiving. But she was soon hiding behind the curtains of the big rooms down-stairs, and, upon one memorable occasion, took refuge under the library table, while the sweet rapid voice of the hostess clarioned throughout the house. She was drawn guiltily forth by a deep chuckle from the arm-chair in the window. Mr. Toole regarded her with a twinkle in his bright old eyes, and no resentment.

"I won't tell on ye," he said. "I feel like it meself, at times. Ada's a good child, as good as a born egoist can be, but—well—we are not all made on the same plan. And this life don't suit you. You're a dreamer. I know

one when I see one, for I've that side to meself, and now that life is easy it's most the only side I've got left. Sit down in that corner behind the bookcase and I'll read to you from one of the old poets, Byron, belike. If Ada finds us, I'll send her kiting. She didn't bring me up."

When Isabel, in the solitude of her bed, found time to think, she concluded that if she could eliminate all men from her week except Mr. Hofer and those of his particular set, she might still enjoy herself. The San Francisco society youth has always been a failure. Except in rare instances he has not been outside his native State, has read nothing, and is casual of manner. Although more young men of the favored class attend the home universities than formerly, the students that derive the full benefit of these institutions are rarely those that intend to make a business of dancing, and calling on Sunday afternoons. It is yet too soon to weld cultivation with leisure, and, for the matter of that, most of the society youth have their living to make, combining business and fashion with a moderate success. Like Wellington's puppies, they have proved themselves of sound metal when put to the crucial test, but as an intellectual diversion they might as well be mechanical toys. The leader has not yet arisen that can permanently combine the older and younger sets. They mingle at great functions, but the dancing set monopolizes the season's stage.

Of this set Mrs. Hofer was an enthusiastic member, and even at dinner rarely entertained any other. Occasionally, and once during Isabel's visit, she invited some friends of her husband, who never went to parties, and often entertained when his wife was elsewhere; but these men did as much talking as listening, and that was

no part of Mrs. Hofer's system. Isabel had flashing vistas of small groups of men and women, distinguished socially as well as mentally, that entertained each other, or met at a new club through which Mrs. Hofer whisked her one night,—a club where the best of Bohemia met the more intellectual members of society; and she knew that in these groups she might find also the higher class business and professional men, and a few of leisure that enjoyed life without either dancing or drinking. But Mrs. Hofer, although far too well satisfied with life and herself to be a snob, loved brilliancy, splendor, constant excitement, dancing, chatter; and only her chosen set could provide the banquet. She could dance every night from ten until two, and awaken in mid-morning as fresh as a rose. She had the wardrobe of the storied princess, and her guests and friends must contribute their share to the brilliancy of all gatherings. She detested shabbiness; it was the only thing that depressed her spirits. Proud as she was of her husband, his aims, and his position in the community, his friends and their themes frankly bored her. She liked talk, not conversation. She really loved him, however, and was far too clever to let him feel neglected. He was inordinately proud of her, and grateful that she permitted him to give his time to his own interests, instead of dragging him about to groan against the wall. She had her little crosses and disappointments, for she had many servants and dressmakers; but, on the whole, Isabel had never seen any one so persistently happy, nor with more reason. Even her three children were as sturdy as young calves, and although they yelled like demons for an hour every morning—reawaking to the sense of a vague something life still denied them, and infuriated at the

thought—Mrs. Hofer merely turned over on her pillow with an indulgent smile. It never occurred to her that the rest of the household might be less indulgent; and the nursery above Isabel's room was not the least of the causes that contributed to a frantic longing for the thirty-first of December.

XXXVII

BUT it was not until four o'clock on the day of release that she found herself actually alone in her chilly and chaste boudoir on the higher hill; Mrs. Hofer escorted her home and remained for many last words. Then Isabel fell into a chair before the mounting fire and shut her eyes. Lady Victoria was out. Gwynne was not expected until the evening train. She wished that she had not promised to dine with the Stones at seven. The house was as silent as a tomb; but while she was still rejoicing in the sudden cessation of sound and motion, the door opened and Gwynne entered. She gave him a surly nod, and he explained that he had come down in the morning, in order to be at hand to welcome her; had even meditated going to her rescue. Isabel deigned no reply, and he took possession of a deep chair, settled himself on his backbone, and regarded her attentively.

"I am sorry you have not enjoyed your week as much as I have done," he observed. "The weather has been magnificent, and I have spent all the days out-of-doors, riding, walking, duck-shooting—taking liberties with your boat, and even your launch. I never enjoyed myself more—after such close study, and all the rest of it, I suppose. I must say you don't look very fit. You are pale instead of white, and—well—cross. Judging from those models of literary elegance and Christian charity, the San Fran-

cisco weekly society sheets—with which I whiled away that infernal train journey—you have been fêted like visiting royalty, photographed by the foremost in his art—which would appear to be the equivalent of painted for the Academy—and your family history seems to have been written up from old files, with even more picturesqueness than accuracy—"

"I wish you would keep still. You didn't talk half so much in England. I shall hate you if you become wholly American."

"I am a born egotist. Ask my mother. Or my long-suffering friends and constituents. You did all the talking at Capheaton—or gave me a wide berth. But here my mother neither talks nor listens—" He paused suddenly and lowered his voice. "Is anything the matter with my mother, do you think? I never saw any one so changed. Do you suppose she hates California and is staying here only on my account?—I have offered more than once to pay her bills; and she is used to them, anyway. For heaven's sake persuade her to go back and enjoy herself in her own fashion. I really don't need her—haven't time. And in spite of your liberal thorns and maddening incomprehensibilities, you can always put homesickness to flight. Sometimes I think she is ill, and then again she looks as fit as ever."

"She has developed nerves. All women get them sometime or other. And there is a certain order of women with whom beauty and fascination are a vocation. When those pass they hate life."

"What rot. No doubt she's a bit off her feed and restless. Probably the climate doesn't suit her. Heaven knows it is nervous enough. But I don't pretend to un-

derstand women. What's up with you? Didn't you enjoy being a belle, after all?"

"I was not a belle. I was a distinct failure."

"What?" Gwynne sat up and forward. "If you want to psychologize, fire away. It always interests me."

"I have no intention of psychologizing. I haven't had time to think. But I do know that a life lived all on the surface—and at lightning speed—doesn't suit me a bit." She gave him a rapid sketch of her week. "I was with them, but not of them; no doubt of that. Old Mr. Toole told me one day that I was a dreamer, and I am afraid that is the solution. I like to imagine myself doing things, but I don't like actually doing them. I found that out over and over again in Europe. I can't tell you how I have longed for a girl's good time here in San Francisco—denied all these years, and my birthright. I was bored everywhere. I cannot make talk; I can only talk spontaneously when I am interested. I couldn't even enjoy the dancing—for the prospect of entertaining those brats between times. And they were all afraid of me. I never could be a belle like either the old ones or the new ones; the fault lies wholly in myself, not in circumstances or materials. *I don't really want it.* No girl can be a social success unless she cares tremendously for it. Merely pretty girls are often popular, simply because popularity is the breath of life to them. I wouldn't try it again for anything on earth. I long to be at home watching the marsh, and not a soul to talk to. That was all I was made for. A dreamer! I am terribly disappointed."

"But Society is a mere phase. So is Stone's Bohemia. The town is full of clever people. You can select and form your own set—when you are ready."

"I am afraid I don't care about it. I dislike the actual effort. So long as Mr. Hofer and those men are talking I am interested, but even so I have enjoyed—far more—thinking about and planning to know them. I am nothing but a dreamer."

"And you have just discovered that?" asked Gwynne, curiously. "I may not have made an exhaustive study of woman, but up to a certain point I know you; and I have not waited for Father O'Toole to enlighten me. I could have told you that you would hate all this sort of thing. You had a mere taste of it in English country-houses, where entertaining has reached such a point of perfection that a man never feels so much at home as when in some one's else house. If you had waited for a London season you would have been as quickly disillusioned. You have the most impossible ideals—"

"I can realize them when I am alone," said Isabel, defiantly. "I shall be as happy as ever on the ranch, the day after to-morrow."

"That sort of happiness will do very well for a while—living in your imagination and all that. But what is it going to lead to?"

"Lead to? It is enough in itself."

"You can't live on moonshine for ever. I told you before that I understood your particular form of idealism; but although I believe that man will certainly be happier when he lives more within that structure of infinite variety, himself, less and less dependent upon the aggregations Life has devised for amusing and tormenting him, still we must reach that condition by very slow degrees; if we take it with a leap the result will be an ugly and disastrous selfishness. If you can prove to the world that you have

found happiness in the cultivation of the higher faculties, you will serve a purpose in life, for you will encourage a certain class of women born with such serious lacks, in the health or the affections, or even in the power to endure the mere monotonies of married life, that they are better off alone; but who often feel themselves a failure and drop into morbidity and decay. That means contact for your highness, however. If you sit down by your marsh for the rest of your life and dream, you miss the whole point. And when time forced you to realize the uncompromising selfishness of such a life—where would your happiness be then?"

"Now you are talking by the book. Why are we so sure that it is a part of our duty to make others happy? That may be but one more superstition to rout. If we manage to be happy ourselves, and through the exercise of the higher faculties alone, we may be serving an end decreed from the beginning; by some subtle process, as incomprehensible as even the commonplaces of life, add to the sum of happiness, and so serve life far better than by scattering ourselves all over the surface. But I told you something of this before and have not forgotten the result."

"Neither have I, but one can get accustomed to any idea. What I want to know is—do you leave youth entirely out of your calculations?"

"Oh—youth! Well—it is possible I might not if I had not lived through its tragedy already—for which I am thankful."

"You have had romance and tragedy, and you are a very experienced young woman, but you have not had happiness," said Gwynne, shrewdly. "That, too, is a



birthright, and sooner or later you will demand it. Social conquests have palled in seven days. In time chickens also will cease to satisfy, and books, and dreams, and sunsets, and liberty. The peculiar conditions and events of your first quarter-century demanded an interval before beginning again; and filled with all you have deliberately chosen—all, that is, but chickens, which are a work not of God but of supererogation. But intervals come to an end like other things. When this finishes you will suddenly demand happiness—the real thing."

"You mean that I will fall in love again, I suppose."

"I mean that you will love."

"Now you are hair-splitting. Are you qualifying to contribute fictionized essays to the American magazines?"

"I am stating facts and don't care a hang about sarcasm. Just now you have spasms when some aspect of nature exalts you. I have watched you with considerable amusement. But it is natural enough—merely a sort of forerunner of what will happen when nature establishes her currents with your own interior landscapes. Then there will be earthquakes and hurricanes—your cultivated realism and inherent romanticism will become hopelessly mixed, and you will be really happy."

"More likely, such moments are the forerunners of a state which shall be an eternal exaltation. Personal immortality is only to be desired if it insures the lifting of our faculties to their highest power of expression. Anything else would mean a boundless ennui. As for my present inertia, is it not the duty of some few to pass their lives in appreciation of the past? Heaven knows there are enough looking out for the present. And I am sick of the superstition that love is all. I told you before that the

happiness of women, at least, depended upon relegating it to its proper place. Once I regretted that Prestage did not die while I still believed in him, so that I could have lived my life with his memory, as Concha Argüello did with Rezánov's. But even that would have been a species of slavery, and I should have chafed at the bond; never had this divine sense of freedom."

"I pass over the majority of your arguments—I must sleep on them. But when have I maintained that love was all? If that were my doctrine should I be reading my head off, investing in Class A buildings, talking politics to farmers, and revolving plans for the conquest of California? I should be making love to you. That is what I should like to do, however, and what I propose to do when I am ready."

"Are you in love with me?"

"I hardly know, but I suspect that I shall be. If I deliberately choose you now as my life partner, you cannot complain that I am the mere slave of passion. I don't fancy I look it at this moment. I have had those fevers, and am willing to admit their brevity. No doubt if I had not been so occupied of late I should have had another. As it is, I am blessedly permitted to foresee it; and to keep my brain clear enough meanwhile to think for both of us."

"Very cousinly, but I can think for myself."

She had risen, but he stood with his back against the door for a moment.

"Another thing—" he said. "You need a buffer. You have remarkable powers, and you might realize some of your dreams if the prospect of initiatives did not alarm your secretly feminine soul. The two of us together could conquer the world. Now go ahead and dream until dreams pall and I have more time."

XXXVIII

"IBSEN will live, not as a dramaturgist, but as the greatest professor of dramaturgy the world has ever known." "Only one way left to be original—never write about Italy." "When we say that a man is a high type what we really mean is that he is the great exception to the type." "That progressive type of bore—the man with a grievance." "San Francisco is the cradle and the grave of more genius than ever was packed into any city, ancient or modern. It is like our money, 'easy come, easy go.'" "And more Hell." "An epigram is only to be forgiven when a memorable thought is packed into a phrase that sticks."

As Isabel and Gwynne escaped from the little Italian restaurant into the blare and glare of the street, their heads were ringing with much brilliant if somewhat affected talk. They had sat with their hosts at the "newspaper table." It was the fashion at the moment to express life in paradoxes, and with a nice adjustment of commas and colons. There had been no talk of politics in this Bohemia, nor of society; nor yet of other subjects that commanded its attention when the long day gave place to the shorter night: the women present were respectable, many of them wives, and not a few went into society when they chose. There was much talk of the fads with which the world was ridden, never a reference to the literature or art of the

past; and there was something almost pathetic in the prostration of these brilliant young men, who had never crossed the boundaries of their State, to European groups, some of whose members were already passé, but still loomed gigantic from the far edge of the Pacific. Few American writers are popular in California, however they may be read; and the reason, no doubt, lies in the mixed blood to which all Europe has contributed, and which is full of affinities little experienced by the rest of the country. Even the famous cooking is un-American. The French, Italian, and Spanish restaurants are exactly what they claim to be; their very atmosphere might have been imported. The many that prefer restaurant life even to the excellent cooking to be found in the average home, give their highest preference to the legacy of the Spaniard; they eat hot sauces and Chile peppers with every dish; and *tamales* are sold on the street corners. This is enough to make the San Franciscan an exotic, and it contributes in a great measure to his fatal content. These young men had no real knowledge of the world, but they had their own world, and were by no means provincial in the accepted sense. But the majority were satisfied to coruscate to an ever applauding audience—for a few years; with money easily got and delightfully spent; to regard Life as a game, not as a business. Afterwards the rut, the friendly pocket—nowhere so open as in San Francisco—a job now and then, more than one way of forgetting that in times gone by a fellow was one of those "coming men" the wanton heedless city turns out with the same profusion that gorges her markets and flaunts her sun for eight months of the year.

To Gwynne they seemed like some primitive race

flourishing before its time. He no longer argued with them, for he had the disadvantage of being a scholar, and it interfered with his tolerance of fads on the rampage; but they saddened him, made him feel almost elderly—and abominably healthy. To-night, although some of the complexions of these young men were green, and others red, they had been brilliant without undue hilarity. They intended to get very drunk later on—if only as a compliment to the New Year—but they were far too accomplished for precipitancy. Stone, alone, refilled his glass so often that Gwynne announced abruptly that they were missing the fun in the street, and Paula promptly took possession of his arm. Stone followed, rumbling disapproval, with Isabel. This arrangement was not to Gwynne's taste, but he had developed subtlety in such matters and bided his time.

Kearney Street from Telegraph Hill to Market Street, a mile or more, was a blaze of light, and crowded with people. It was a very orderly throng, for it was composed of the respectable element of the city, and if they had laid dignity aside for the moment, they were not distractingly noisy. All were throwing confetti, and many had tin horns. Isabel saw the Hofers, arm in arm, tooting vigorously. Half of society was there; and many staid and strenuous business men were promenading with their wives and daughters, more than one with his neck encircled by paper ribbons of many hues. The street-cars had stopped, but there were a number of automobiles filled with masques, singling out their friends on the pavement and hurling confetti.

But it was not until Stone and his party reached the great central highway, Market Street, that the scene was

characteristic. Here the windows of the Palace Hotel, and all the other buildings, great and small, were illuminated and filled with people. And the entire city would seem to have emptied itself not only into Market Street, but into those streets on the north side that completed the "all-night district." The people in the windows wore their gayest attire, and there was often music as well as light behind them. They threw down confetti by the bushel on the masses below. And the masses! There was no polite restraint here. Largely recruited from the immense South of Market Street district, they were out for a good time, and its inevitable expression was noise. They were in the best of tempers, but the din was terrific. They hooted and yelled, and every one of the several thousand had a tin horn and blew it with all his might. Every undefended ear was victimized. Isabel pressed one of her own against Stone's shoulder and covered the other with her hand. But she stared at the crowd with all the interest of the secluded for the mass. There were painted ladies of all grades, and hundreds of shop-girls, covered with white paint or lavender powder, their figures exaggerated with the corset of the moment, and violent plumage on head and waist, although they had prudently left their best skirts at home. Many of them were astonishingly pretty, and no doubt more respectable than they looked. Mrs. Paula was in her element. She wore her red hat and blouse, waved her hands to the windows, exulted in the showers of confetti that descended in response, and shouted into Gwynne's ear that she was singled out for special attentions. In truth she received more than her escort relished. Her natural affinity with the class above which she had risen so high had never been more patent,

and kindred spirits looked from many approving eyes. Suddenly both cheeks were painted black by a too fraternal hand, and then a man tried to kiss her. This was more than even Paula could stand, and she flung herself into her husband's arms, daubing his shirt with black and red. He dropped Isabel and struck out furiously. There was an immediate scuffle, during which Gwynne basely drew Isabel's arm through his and pressed forward into the thick of the crowd.

"We have had enough of them, and no doubt they have had of us," he said, comfortably. "Now we will enjoy ourselves."

"Well, if they blacken my face don't notice them. One would think Lyster would know how to play the game by this time."

"He is always ready to fight after the fifth glass of champagne. I have had lively experiences with him."

Conversation was impossible in the din. Isabel's face was smudged more than once, but no other liberty was attempted. Gwynne also looked like a chimney-sweep, and was addressed as "darling" several times, but the crowd was inoffensive until a chain-gang of hoodlums dashed irresistibly through it, pushing many off the sidewalk, and rousing a lurid accompaniment. One man, solid and stolid, stood his ground on the edge of the chain and administered a hearty kick upon each ankle as it passed. There were angry howls in response, but none could retaliate without breaking the chain, nor indeed could they control its momentum.

"That is one of those things one would like to have thought of one's self," said Gwynne, admiringly, rubbing his ribs, for he had hastily swung Isabel outward, and

received much of the impact. "We might as well get out of this."

They slowly made their way into one of the cross streets that seemed to leap like a blazing meteor down from the darkness of the heights. But the crowd was still as dense, and the street but a third the width of Market Street. Not even an automobile attempted to force its way. Saloon doors were swinging. Policemen stood in front of them, but there was no further disorder. Gwynne and Isabel pressed back against the wall of a shop and watched and waited. They were to celebrate the birth of the New Year with the Hofers at a restaurant on the block above, but there was no prospect of reaching it at present.

The sky was cloudless. If the evening chill had come in from the Pacific, it was routed by the mass of humanity and the downpour of heat from the electric lights. All the great signs were blazing, many in colors. And there was music in all the saloons and restaurants; it rose and fell with the noise of the tin horn and the hoot of the happy. The people in the windows here threw down not only confetti but flowers, and stacks at each elbow added to the mass of color. Even the men had tied bright silk handkerchiefs about their necks, and they were bestrewed with bits of gold and silver paper, and festooned with colored ribbon. Gwynne and Isabel were quickly singled out and pelted with balls that opened with the impact and tangled them together with the endless paper streamers.

It was eleven o'clock before the crowd began its retreat to their restaurants, and Gwynne and Isabel were able to make their way up to the celebrated resort where the Hofers awaited them. They were shown to a dressing-

room where they could wash their faces, and then to the gallery above the body of the restaurant which was divided into boxes, and occupied by all sorts and kinds of people, including many of their friends. In Hofer's box was a large bottle on ice and a table set for supper. Mrs. Hofer, looking less approving than earlier in the evening, sat half-hidden by a curtain, but her husband, in common with most of the other people in the gallery, was throwing confetti upon his friends below. He seized Gwynne and dragged him to the front of the box, and the new arrival was greeted by shouts from every man, it seemed to him, that he had met in San Francisco. The large hall with its tables of all sizes was as densely packed as the streets had been.

"Ever see anything like this before?" demanded Hofer. He paused with a gasp and dislodged a ball of confetti from his throat. "Look with all your eyes, old man. There are the best and the worst—all who can pay the price: the reformers cheek by jowl with the mayor and the Boss, by Jove! The matron and the other kind of matron, the fair young girl who hopes to buy a rich husband, and the sort that has to give more and take less; the family man and his family, not a bit afraid of contamination, enjoying himself to the limit; financiers, millionaires, corporation bosses and curb-stone brokers, newspaper men, artists, politicians big and little, society youths and girls severely chaperoned. See that crowd with the queens of the Tenderloin? Ever hear what one of our local wits said about them: 'Pity the worst of men should be named for the best of fish!'"

Hofer, who felt it his duty as a good citizen to empty his bottle with the rest of the world on New Year's eve,

rattled on. Mrs. Hofer gave an occasional warning cough. Like most San Francisco women of her class there was a good deal of prudery under her gayety, and no instinct whatever for Bohemia. She had come to the restaurant because her husband had urged it, but she took no part, and threw only an occasional glance at the floor. But as Isabel was manifestly interested, she presented her arm and hat to the gaze of the crowd, that her guest might partake in the doubtful fun if she wished.

Isabel and Gwynne, still tangled in the paper streamers and vigorously pelted from below, leaned eagerly over the railing and flung handsful of gold and silver bits upon the already glittering throng. It certainly was an astonishing sight. There was little seeking after inconspicuousness, even in the boxes. All were there to celebrate the birth of the New Year, and to "play the game," however chastened they might feel on the morrow. All were drinking champagne and growing more hilarious every moment. One girl modestly dressed, and known to Mrs. Hofer as an entirely respectable young person, although not of her own class, was sitting on the knee of the man she was to marry, and drinking from his glass. The ladies of the lower ten thousand were nicely graded. Some were dressed with a severe and simple elegance, and painted as delicately as a miniature. These were very quiet, the carven smile on their crimson lips not disturbing the careful arrangement of their features; and their eyes never lost their jewel-like immobility. They were attended by what is vaguely known as "men about town," men with money to spend and no position to lose. It was no longer the fashion among conspicuous men to flaunt their mistresses, but these indefinite persons kept the old traditions alive.

Still other women blazed with paint and jewels and excessive richness of attire. In attendance were the big sleek brutes, whom all other men held in contempt. But all were happy to-night and asking no man for his respect.

At a table in the very middle of the room was a young, buxom, and very naughty-looking damsel, who evidently was a belle: the circle of black coats about her round table was unbroken save by herself. What dress she wore was black, and on her golden head was an immense black hat covered with feathers. Her abundant diamonds were almost overwhelmed. Every time one of her escort raised his glass to his lips he toasted her, and she rose to respond, presumably to give the company the benefit of the tiny waist that tapered off the white acre above. She was irreverently hooted, but imperturbably rose and fell like a jack-in-the-box.

Hofer finally sat down to supper with his guests, but they had barely finished when every clock in town began to boom the midnight hour and there was a wild ringing of bells all over the city. Down-stairs one of the young men ran to the orchestra, whirled the leader from his seat, flung off his own coat, and led the crashing music with a tin horn. Hofer and Gwynne went to the front of the box, glasses in hand. All below had sprung to their feet and were waving and clicking their champagne-glasses, singing, cat-calling, tooting, cheering. Even Isabel and Mrs. Hofer leaned forward. In the turmoil they did not notice that the young woman in the centre of the room was standing on her table, her befeathered head flung back, draining her glass; but they turned just in time to see one of her admirers rifle her bodice and wag his trove at the company.

"This is too much!" cried Mrs. Hofer, furiously, and

running to the back of the box. "Nicolas, I insist!" But Nicolas was enjoying himself immensely and paid no attention.

Isabel had been about to follow Mrs. Hofer when she lost her breath and nearly fell over the edge of the box. Lady Victoria, accompanied by a man who was unmistakably a pugilist, had entered by a side door.

Isabel's brain seemed to eliminate every thought it had ever possessed and hurriedly to remodel down to one agonizing point. The pair were endeavoring to force their way forward to a table that evidently had been reserved for them. Gwynne was leaning over the railing drinking to Mr. and Mrs. Trennahan. In a moment his interested eyes would rove over the crowd again. Isabel suddenly fell on him, bearing him backward.

"Take me out—quick!" she gasped. "I am horribly ill!"

Gwynne, grasping his hat, was fairly borne out of the box. As Isabel was ghastly and trembling he assumed that she was really ill, and made no protest, but half-carried her down the stair. They attracted no attention and reached the sidewalk in a moment.

"If we can only find a carriage!" he said, solicitously. "You never can walk up those hills. What an atmosphere that was! I don't wonder you came a cropper. I hope the Hofers won't mind—"

"Nobody minds anything."

She took his arm and they walked up the street. The bells were still ringing, horns tooting, but the street was comparatively empty. At the corner a Salvation Army corps was singing hymns to a flabby and penitent congregation. Just beyond was a row of hacks awaiting

the weary reveller, and in a moment Gwynne and Isabel were driving rapidly along a dark and deserted street.

"Do you feel better?" he asked.

She did not answer for a moment, afraid of breaking down. Gwynne was sure to offer prompt consolation, and even if he assumed the brotherly attitude, she had no wish to be taken in his arms. In spite of herself his calm reiteration that he intended to marry her had forced its seed into her brain, for ideas projected from bold determined minds are insistent things. But never had love and all connected with it been so hateful to her as at this moment. He peered into her face.

"You are not going to cry!" he exclaimed. "You!"

"No, I am not! But I never was so nearly overcome. Such noise! Such sights! Such heat! It was too bad to take you away, though. Shall you go back?"

"Not I! May I smoke? We shall be an hour reaching the base of our cliff at this rate. He is apparently going out to the cemeteries under pretence of avoiding the hills."

He elevated his feet to the opposite seat and lit a cigarette.

"I wish my mother had come home before we left. It was a pity for her to miss this. Even if she would not dine with us, I could have returned for her."

"I saw her in the crowd with a party of people. I might have told you, but my mind has been in as many pieces to-night as a bag full of confetti. I am sure she has seen it all."

"Good. It was what you might call a trifle variegated, but not to be missed. Great old town, this! No wonder they think California is the world, out here. It is what

they say of the London flats: 'self-contained.' I like Hofer better than ever. The man whom champagne transforms into a big silly boy is the right sort. Is there really a workaday world, a city to reform, and two ranches up the valley?"

XXXIX

THEY reached home sooner than might have been expected, but there were many fares below, and the hackman galloped down the hill as recklessly as if a slip would not have been the death of himself and his valiant beasts.

Isabel went directly to her room and persuaded Gwynne to go to his, arguing that some one of his mother's party would be sure to bring her home. As he was to take the 7:30 train he made no protest. Even were he still awake when Lady Victoria returned, the fog was rolling in; nor was he likely to be leaning from his window.

Isabel heard her come in two hours later, and it was another hour before she slept. She had determined to ask her wayward but still awesome relative to leave San Francisco before her son found her out or she had time more fully to disgrace him. But how to approach the most unapproachable woman she had ever known with so delicate a proposition was a question that made her toss about her ancestral bed and kept the blood in her brain. She recalled the slip of paper announcing a prize-fight, and wondered at her stupidity; for she had heard something of the resources of blasée women ere this.

Finally she fell asleep. She was awakened by a sharp earthquake—grim herald of the coming year! She was too well seasoned to have felt anything more than a passing

annoyance, had she not heard Lady Victoria give a piercing scream and run from her room. Whereupon she rejoiced wickedly, flung a wrapper across her shoulders, and went into the hall. Gwynne was standing in his doorway, looking more asleep than awake, and intensely disapproving. Lady Victoria was leaning against the wall, her eyes wide with terror. Isabel took her firmly by the arm, marched her into her room, helped her into a dressing-gown, and, pushing her into a chair, took one opposite.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Lady Victoria. "I had forgotten about earthquakes—"

"Earthquake!" said Isabel, contemptuously. "That was a mere vibration. We had sixty-two of those last winter. If you only stay long enough we will show you what California really can do. Every ten years or so we have a good hard shake—enough to bring the plaster down; and every half-century or so she gets up and turns over. I have made a specialty of earthquakes, and could tell you extraordinary tales of some of the great ones of the south—"

"Please do not. I prefer to forget. But don't leave me. Fancy Angélique sleeping through such a thing!"

"Doubtless she is not in the house. All the world was out last night."

"Was it?"

"I think this as good a time as any other to tell you, Cousin Victoria, that I saw you last night—just as the clocks were striking twelve."

"Did you?"

Her trained features did not betray her, but Isabel saw the figure under the loose gown grow rigid and brace itself against the back of the chair. And as Isabel stared at her,

with the desperate courage born of the sudden plunge, it seemed to her that she felt a vibration from the nausea, the disgust, the hatred of life, the death-rattle of great passions dying hard. She wondered again, if, given the same conditions, she would have differed much from the woman she had brought to bay. Her early trials and provincial upbringing had developed her Puritan inheritance, but she had had flashing and startling glimpses of her depths now and again. For a moment she felt the waters of an immemorial ennui rise high in her own soul, then drop to the grinning skulls and sparkless ashes of old pleasures. She shuddered back, and raised her eyes once more to the haughty mask opposite.

"I think I understand," she said, gently. "But you must go. I kept him from seeing you to-night. But he would find out in time. As you know how he believes in you, you can imagine the consequences. I suppose you have not done anything so public before, or I should have heard of it. I vaguely recall that women can look on at prize-fights from private boxes. Last night, it isn't likely that any one noticed. Or if they did they would question the evidence of their senses in the morning, the best of them. So please go."

She paused. Lady Victoria stared at her without the slightest change of expression. Isabel continued imperturbably. "London is so vast—if you must have that sort of liberty, for heaven's sake go where it is most likely to be overlooked—and where libel laws are operative. For all its license, San Francisco is one of the most censorious and unrelenting societies in the world, and has more old-fashioned people than New York. If you become the talk of the town, and those awful weekly papers

find you out, Elton will be a long while living it down. It will make ridiculous all his efforts at reform. Perhaps he would no longer care. I fancy it would affect him that way."

She rose, and Lady Victoria rose also and walked to the door. As she opened it she smiled grimly. "You have courage," she said. "I am more than ever convinced that you are the wife for Jack. I will go."



PART III

1906





I

ON the same afternoon Lady Victoria developed appendicitis and went to bed for two months. She was only in danger for a short time, but the doctor announced his intention of giving her a rest cure, and his patient, who was profoundly indifferent, made no protest. And if invalidism is a career, an illness is an adventure; moreover, no doubt, it was a relief to Victoria Gwynne to have her thinking done by some one else for a time. Isabel had thoughtfully rung up the handsomest doctor in San Francisco the moment the disease declared itself, and it was to be expected that he would find his patient interesting enough to spend an hour by her bedside daily. It was manifestly impossible to transfer a woman of Lady Victoria's heroic proportions down that rickety and almost perpendicular flight of steps to an ambulance, but the best of nurses were engaged, Anne Montgomery agreed to come every morning and attend to the housekeeping, Gwynne established a long-distance telephone beside the bed, and Mrs. Trennahan, whom Lady Victoria liked—she could not stand Mrs. Hofer—promised a daily visit; and an automobile trip to the south as soon as the doctor would permit.

It was nearly a week before Isabel, who had sat up with Gwynne during the first two nights, and been on the rush ever since, was able to return to her ranch. She had

offered to remain in town altogether, but Lady Victoria replied with some show of irritation that if either she or her son sacrificed their time and interests on her account it would oppress her mind with a sense of guilt, and hinder her recovery. She would telephone to them at a certain hour every day, and if they came down once a week as usual she should enjoy seeing them, instead of being worried by a sense of obligation. In truth she was glad to be rid of them for more reasons than one.

It was late in the afternoon when Isabel arrived in Rosewater, and business detained her there for several hours. She dined with the Tom Coltons, and the conversation was a quaint mixture of babies, politics, servants, and the Hofer ball. Colton drove her home, and talked the steady monotonous stream with which he tricked the world into believing that his own ideas were still in the germ. Upon this occasion he might as well have betrayed his secrets or quoted the poets, for Isabel paid no attention whatever to his monologue. She was consumed with her desire to be alone once more. She was tired of the very sound of the human voice, and remembered with satisfaction the silence of her Chuma and the taciturnity of her men.

When she finally reached her home she illuminated it from top to bottom and wandered about in a passion of delight. Her sensation of gratitude and novelty in her solitude and freedom could not have been keener if she had been absent for six months. Although it was too cold to sit out-of-doors, she walked up and down the piazza for an hour, watching the crawling tide and the brown tumbled hills. The boat was late, and every other light was out when it appeared, a mere string of magic lanterns

with a red globe suspended aloft. Isabel struck a match and answered the captain's familiar greeting from his high perch in the pilot-house; then went within, for the fog was rolling over Tamalpais, dropping down the mountains in great sea waves. But even then she would not go to bed, and lose her knowledge of recovered treasure. After a time, however, she fell asleep in her chair before the fire. She awoke suddenly, but drowsily surprised and disappointed not to find Gwynne in the chair opposite. Then she became aware of the cause of her interrupted slumbers. There was the sound of fire-arms and of barking dogs on the hills sacred to the Leghorn. In three minutes she had her skirts off, her high boots on, and was running, pistol in hand, to the colony, announcing her coming by a preliminary discharge. Then for the next hour she and her men fought one of those hordes of migratory rats that suddenly steal upon chicken-ranches and leave ruin behind them. Isabel had a genuine horror of rats. She would far rather have faced an army of snakes; but with her rubber boots, the well-trained dogs, and her accuracy of aim, she had nothing to fear. Those that were not slaughtered were finally driven off, and Isabel, content even in this phase of her strictly personal life, went to bed and slept the sleep of youth and health and an easy conscience.

The next day began the torrential rains that lasted for three weeks, almost without an hour's intermission; that wiped out the marsh, and threatened floods for all the valleys of the north. The boats no longer looked as if cutting their way through the lands, but adrift on a great lake. Tamalpais and the mountains below it had disappeared, as if hibernating, and the winds raged up and down the long valley, shaking old houses like Isabel's to

their foundations, and leaving not a leaf on the trees. Nothing could be wilder or more desolate than the scene from Isabel's piazza, where, encased in rubber, she took her exercise, often battling every inch of one way against a driving wall of rain. Rosewater, or any sort of house except her own, she did not see for days at a time, nothing but that gray foaming muttering expanse of water, its flood and fall no longer distinguishable. At first she was more than content to be so isolated. Her practical life occupied little of her time; only a daily, and always unexpected, dash up the slopes to see that her men were not shirking their duties, and a weekly trip to Rosewater with her produce: she used her own incubators in bad weather. A visit to San Francisco she did not attempt, and she was quite sure that the daily conversation over the telephone —when it had not blown down—was as sufficing for Lady Victoria as for herself. She read and studied and dreamed, became indifferent to what she chose to call her failure as a society ornament, and planned a larger future; to be realized when she had come to care less for dreams and more for realities. No doubt that state of mind would develop before long, and meanwhile she might as well enjoy herself according to her present mood. Nothing could alter her belief that all unhappiness came from contacts, and certainly she had proved her theories so far, and took a pagan joy in mere living. She loved the wild battle of the elements, the waste below her garden, with as keen a sensuousness as the spring and the flowers, and often sat late in her red room by the fire to enjoy its contrast with the desolation without.

But Gwynne was not a man to be dismissed from the thoughts of any one that knew him as well as his cousin.

He had taken his part in her life as a matter of course, and of late they had been very intimate. During the first days and nights of his mother's illness, they had talked, or sat in companionable silence, by the hour. She had been assailed by regrets more than once that she was to have no part in his life, that he had already won some of his hardest battles with no help of hers, and deliberately had matched their spirits and driven her off the field where she had subtly sought to manage him. She liked him the better for this, but while her vanity retired with philosophy, she regretted her inability to help him. That she had it in her to assist and encourage him in many ways, she needed to be told neither by himself nor his mother, but she was unwilling to pay the price. That she felt his charm, took an even deeper interest in him since he had announced his intention to marry her, she did not pretend to deny, and sometimes caught herself looking out upon a future in which he had as inevitable a part as if it had been decreed from the beginning of time. She also dreamed of the satisfaction and pleasure it would give her to make him really love her, become quite mad about her. But again she was unwilling to pay the price. She argued that this was merely due to the persistence of the solitary ideal; and refused to face the cowardice that lurked in the bottom of her soul. Heroic in every other development of her highly bred character, she had all the secret fear and antagonism of her sex for the other, a profound resentment of the male instinct for possession, and the deeper terror that what Gwynne might find would eventually make her wholly his. Life had given her a deep surface; the depths below it sent up rare vibrations; and her mind was seldom unoccupied. She could add layer upon layer of evasions and subtleties

with no prospect of a rude disturbance; and when the wind ceased for a time she tramped over the hills. But she missed Gwynne increasingly, wondered that he did not brave the elements and come out to her; finally felt herself shamefully neglected, and would not answer his occasional telephone queries as to her well-being.

II

THREE days of floundering through the mud between Lumalitas and Rosewater exhausted Gwynne's patience, and he engaged a furnished suite of rooms on Main Street, moved in his law library, Imura Kisaburo Hinomoto, and several easy-chairs, invested in a red wall-paper for his sitting-room, and was immediately so comfortable, and so relieved to be rid of his dripping sighing trees and flooded valley, that he was almost happy. As he looked down from his window upon the slope of the street crowded with muddy wagons and men in oil-skins and high rubber boots, he recalled the ironical picture Isabel had drawn, that memorable night at Capheaton, of his own future appearance; and as he could not ride out to Old Inn in any other garb, an access of vanity deterred him from going at all. To be sure he could drive out in a closed surrey, but he would have felt equally ridiculous, and Isabel, beyond doubt, would scorn him. Better let her think him indifferent for a while; it might do her good. He could save himself from discourtesy by telephoning occasionally, and, for the matter of that, the less he thought of her at present the better.

For the first time he came intimately in contact with the men of Rosewater: "leading citizens" too busy to call upon him at Lumalitas, or to sit down in their places of business for a chat during the day, and too well trained to ask

strangers home for dinner, were any hospitable instincts left in them. But they soon discovered that his rooms were very comfortable and inviting, his whiskey and tobacco "above par." The homeless citizens of Rosewater, while their wives wrangled at bridge or five-hundred, fell into the habit of "dropping in at Gwynne's," instead of going to the Lodge or the dingy back room of some saloon or lawyer's office. They were at liberty to take off their coats and put their feet on the railing surrounding the large iron stove that sat well out into the room. There were even spittoons for such as clung to the old tradition; and in a short time the large newly built, almost luxurious room took on somewhat of the character of that forum of an older time, the corner grocery. Judge Leslie seldom honored these assemblies, as he was tired at night and rejoiced in a comfortable home; nor did Tom Colton, whose domestic virtues were pronounced; but Mr. Wheaton came, and Mr. Haight, Mr. Boutts, and other solid business men old enough to be Gwynne's father; and they were all deeply interested in Rosewater first, State politics second, and national affairs once in four years; or oftener if there was any pyrotechnical departure from routine. European politics interested them not at all, and if they had any suspicion of Gwynne's real status, they were too accustomed to minding their own business to take any liberties with his reserve.

But they were fully alive to the importance of his addition to the community. He was a large landholder, selling many small farms to acceptable persons; he spent money freely, buying everything he needed for his household and farm in Rosewater, instead of sending to the city; he was studying law with a view to practising in

their midst; and now that Judge Leslie—who proclaimed him a marvel—was threatening to retire, his keen and cautious fellow-citizens needed nothing more than a man of first-class legal ability to take care of their great and varied interests and defend them against the corporation bogie. They found themselves hinting that he should engage in politics as well, when his probationary years were over.

When Gwynne shrugged his shoulders one night and remarked bluntly that he had no desire to work with either of the California machines, and would unquestionably come a howling cropper if he worked against either, Mr. Wheaton answered with the nimbleness of a mind already made up, that he could be sent to Sacramento on an independent ticket—manipulated by the honest men of Rosewater—to fight such of the frauds and tyrannies as the State was suffering acutely from at the moment. During reform spasms the machines were practically powerless, and with the brilliant abilities he would be able to display as soon as he entered public life, and backed by a powerful influence, he could win his way to higher things before the wave subsided. They wanted a senator in Washington who was for his State first and himself next, even more than they wanted a lawyer; and for that matter he could serve their anti-corporation interests better there than here. Meanwhile he would have many opportunities to speak and show the stuff that was in him, draw converts to himself with his fiery eloquence and hard practicality, inculcate the desire for better things, and the necessity for reducing the influence of the army of petty professional politicians to a minimum, make of himself so central and inspiriting a figure that when his time came the best ele-

ment of both parties throughout the State would form an independent body under his leadership.

This was an alluring picture, but if Mr. Wheaton, who had had as little to do with politics as possible, was a bit of a dreamer, there was no question that his dreams were shared by more practical men at the present moment than for many years past; and that his theories were sound, however formidable the alert, resourceful, enormously capitalized army which stood between them and execution. His idol was Abraham Lincoln, and in consequence he "banked" on the good in human nature as a factor, which, in sudden recrudescences of indignant energy, accomplished revolutions of far greater moment than the overthrowing of political machines.

Mr. Wheaton had launched forth upon one particularly stormy night when he happened to be Gwynne's only guest. The host, not to be outdone, was sitting with his feet on the railing of the stove, but as far from the spittoon as possible. He had listened to the long monologue, which involved a sketch of Lincoln's varied career, with more attention than might have been inferred from his half-closed eyes, and his pipe had gone out. It was only recently that any of his neighbors, barring Judge Leslie and Tom Colton, who shared his secret, had definitely proposed a political career to him, in other words divined his abilities and ambitions. But Mr. Wheaton had once been young and adventurous himself, and much if not all of his success in life was due to his shrewd divination of human nature. No man could drive a harder bargain than "Wash" Wheaton (he was named for the father of his country), but he had never been wanting in a vein of humorous sympathy, nor in a fair capacity for friendship as well as enmity.

He raised his eyes from the coals and looked directly at Gwynne, who was relighting his pipe.

"I don't like Tom Colton," he said, abruptly. "And it's not so much because he is the son of that old skinflint, neither. He is a little too much the product of the times—a sort of polished up descendant of that hoodlum element that terrorized San Francisco in the Seventies. He started out as a mere or'nary politician, but the Democratic Boss took him up and his ambitions are growing. What with the money he has and will inherit, and the devilish gall of him, he can play a deep game, and his chances of winning look a little too fair to suit a good many of us. He's nothing better than an anarchist, and without the excuse of the common anarchist—who, at the worst—or his own best—risks his life. Tom Colton and men of his stamp wouldn't risk the skin of their little fingers. All they do is to build a red-hot fire under the political caldron, stir it up with a big stick until it doesn't know where it is at or what it is made of, and then float into power on the steam. This has been one of the rottenest States in the Union for a good many years, and no wonder such men as Tom think they can about do as they please; but a good many are getting pretty damned tired of it, and there's a sort of reform mutter going on here and there that will gather and swell if skilfully manipulated. We've been talking you over, and have concluded to back you up for all we are worth as soon as you are ready—that is to say we would but for one drawback—your friendship with Colton."

"If you choose to call it that. I have told him in as plain English as he will ever hear what I think of his politics, and that if I ever enter public life myself I shall

devote my energies to running him and his like out of it. He is too good-natured and too sure of himself—and his State!—to mind. Moreover, he has four years the start of me. It is possible that I shall go to Sacramento with, and even speak for, him; but he understands perfectly that I am only after experience, will advocate nothing I disapprove of—he actually has certain reforms in his political basket, and whatever may be his intention to compromise when he reaches Sacramento, I, at least, can advocate them in all sincerity; and further open the eyes of all these people to what they ought to want and to have. All this is perfectly understood between us. I, and the honest public clamoring for its rights, do not weigh a feather in the scale, in his opinion, against the might of organization."

"Very good. I suspicioned something of the sort. He can't corrupt you, and you couldn't get a better insight into corruption than through him; so fire away. What's your program, anyhow?"

"It's too soon to make one—be sure that I am willing to return your confidence with my own"—as the sharp china-blue eyes opposite contracted; "but I can do little now except win the confidence of the farmers in this district and of men like yourself. But if a reform party does achieve power, if only for a term, the first thing for it to do is to overhaul the ballot system. Before we reformed ours we were as deep in the mire as yourselves. When the American voter is under the supervision of an honest judiciary, a general system of local reforms will follow as a matter of course."

Mr. Wheaton sighed. "You would have to begin with the judiciary. If you reformed them, and had any strength left, and then reformed the ballot in the manner of your

own country, I guess you'd get about anything you wanted. But you'll need a tidal reform wave, I'm afraid. However, you never can tell what one year will bring forth in this country. On the other hand, the results of certain reforms, fought and died for, have done as much to make us pessimists as any of the immovable abuses. Take the question of Civil Service Reform, for instance. In the old days when you wanted to induce a man to give you the benefit of his abilities and influence during an election, you held out hopes of preferment, and he took your word if he knew your word was good, and worked with a decent sort of ambition—all things being relative. What happens now? Few find anything promising or attractive in the competitive examination. You ask a man—the professional politician he is now, sure enough—to help you get your candidate, or yourself, in, and what happens? The gentleman coolly demands, 'How much?' and holds out his hand. You fill it or he turns his back and walks off. There is just that much less of good left to appeal to in this particular brand of human nature. Ours is a much more complicated civilization than yours, Mr. Gwynne. You were dealing with Britishers only, in 1832. We are trying to digest the riffraff of the world, and can't do it, in spite of such incorrigible optimists as Judge Leslie. Immigrants in the first generation have just about as much feeling for the American flag as a chicken has for Rosewater. They look upon vote-selling as a legitimate way of improving their fortunes, and they are the easy prey of such agitators as Colton, because they had nothing in their own countries, and want the earth in this. Of course their children go to the public schools, and become Americans, but we always have the problem of fresh hordes to deal

with. And new and old—it is easy to plant the weevil in their brains that the rich have corralled all the money, and the laborer—even in California, where he gets the highest wages paid on this earth—is a miserable victim, and entitled to all he doesn't make. They never remember that nearly every capitalist in the country has risen from their own ranks, and that their dreams are mainly occupied with doing the same. But you might as well talk to the trade-winds, especially with such men as Tom Colton stirring the caldron. 'Get rich quick; and selling votes is as good a starter as any.' There you have the moral sickness of the country in a nutshell. And few professions pay better than that of the politician. The pettiest division leader, who does the Boss's dirtiest work, and has fewer redeeming virtues than the midnight burglar, makes such a good thing out of it that the prettiest Salvation Army lass couldn't convince him of the error of his ways. And he enjoys himself. To hang around saloons, prize-fights, help out shyster lawyers with their tricks, and play the game hard during election times—that satisfies him until he sees a chance of stepping into a bigger pair of boots of the same make. But, thank God, there are more honest men out of politics than in. That is the trouble, but there they are, and it will be a part of your business to round them up. Well, I guess I've held forth long enough. I'll send you round a few volumes from my Lincoln library to-morrow. I always go to it when I lose my faith in human nature. Good-night."

And he gathered up his long legs and went out.

In his many talks with his friends in San Francisco, Gwynne had received practically the same suggestions.

The lawyer who advised this group in its necessarily intermittent campaign against the San Francisco politicians was one of the ablest in the United States. He had offered Gwynne a place in his office, a 'courtesy partnership,' when he was ready to move to the city. But Gwynne deliberately remained undecided for the present, although half inclined to practise in the country for some years. If he could not have the inestimable education of the old days, when lawyers jogged about the country with the circuit judges for months at a time, he could at least get into close contact with the plain people in a manner that in a city would be practically impossible. Until the rains began, and after his definite understanding with Colton, he had, during his hours of exercise, formed the habit of "dropping in" upon the small farmers of his political district, under pretence of asking their advice; gauging and sowing. Upon the men that had bought land of him he was able to bestow many small favors, and his old experience with the tenantry of Capheaton gave him an instinctive knowledge of their wants that added to the sum of his popularity. To his inferiors he had never shown the arrogance of his nature, and he welcomed these small toilers as a substitute for his old tenants; for he had missed the poor that kept the sympathies quick—and, perhaps, gave richer shadows to life.

His long lank American figure and slight resemblance to Hiram Otis, who had been an institution if not a favorite, his readiness to stand drinks to his farmer acquaintances, and others, whom he happened to meet in Main Street, the approachableness he had cultivated with some effort, combined with the subtle suggestion that he would not permit a liberty; a characteristic that every true man re-

spects; his reputation for being "dead straight," and his insistence upon receiving his just dues—"all that was coming to him"—in spite of the easy terms he made with several to whom he sold land; all this, in addition to the dignity of being the largest rancher in the county, and a law partner of Judge Leslie, had quickly made him a marked as well as a popular figure. Even his accent was unnoted in that State of many accents.

He had thought out for himself all that Mr. Wheaton had suggested, and if he still had his moments of depression and disgust, and even of revolt, much of his old confidence was returning; although he sometimes reflected, with a sort of whimsical bitterness, upon the difficulty of sustaining an impression of innate greatness unaided by an occasional demonstration. But he had, at least, learned to see people merely as human beings without taking their shells into account; and he also realized that in those storms of spirit, which, at the time, he had deprecated as ebullitions from a too mercurial nature, he had developed more rapidly and precisely than many a man does by the exterior catastrophe. And impersonally his admiration for the land of one set of forefathers grew, although personally he remained cold. But he cultivated all sorts and conditions of men, and hopefully trained himself for the enthusiastic moment.

There were even times when, surrounded by his Rosewater friends, with their lapses into quaint American speech and their intense localism, the old Otis blood stirred in him very strongly; he caught himself using phrases and figures that no doubt were an inheritance with his brain cells. When the walls and furnishings of his room were obscured by smoke, and there were half a

dozen pairs of boots against his stove, it was not difficult to fancy himself back in the old corner grocery on a winter's night: his companions drinking apple cider, instead of rye whiskey, and the orator of the moment sitting, by preference, on a barrel, and munching crackers.

In San Francisco, which he visited twice a week on his return from Berkeley, when alone in the long sloping streets swept with the wind-driven rain, when the gutters roared and the houses looked as deserted as their huddled beaten gardens, stories Isabel had told him of the days of the Argonauts rose like ghosts in his brain, and he would suddenly experience an overwhelming sensation of being at home. His mother promptly dispelled these visions.

On the whole his time was too fully occupied to leave him more than stray moments for the subtler mood; but as day after day, finally week after week passed, with no prospect of fair weather, the monotony and confinement affected his nerves, he tired of the unrelieved companionship of men, and wished that Isabel would move in to Rosewater for the winter months. He rang her up, when this brilliant idea occurred to him, but was informed by Chuma that she was not in the house. On the following day he telephoned again, and learned that she slept, on the third that she was engaged in the delicate operation of extracting some deleterious substance from the crop of a valuable hen. Whereupon he swore vigorously, and vowed that he would forget her until the skies cleared. But "the skies they were ashen and sober," and he caught himself dreaming over his "Torts," or during one of Mr. Boutts's ecstatic visions of Rosewater with a great hotel in the style of the old Missions, and an electric railway. (Mr. Boutts, by-the-way, never elevated his feet to the

railing of the stove, but always sat on the edge of his chair, a hand on either knee.) He took the train impulsively to San Francisco, one afternoon, and talked of reinforced concrete with his contractor, and San Francisco politics with Hofer. He even called upon several young ladies, who interested him less than ever, and returned to Rosewater at the end of four days with a sense of duties neglected and a slip in his self-mastery. This put him in such a bad humor that he directed his Asiatic to refuse him to the members of his informal Club, and wished he were back in San Francisco doing the town with Stone.



III

HE was glowering into the open door of the stove and wondering why on earth he had not remained in town over Sunday at least, when he became aware that his noiseless Jap was standing at his elbow.

"What is it?" he demanded, testily. "I wish you would get a pair of creaky boots."

"A gentleman," replied the impervious Oriental.

"I told you I would not see anybody."

"But he has a card." It was not often that the cool even tones of Imura Kisabura Hinomoto fluctuated, but Gwynne detected a faint accent of respect. Somewhat surprised himself, he glanced at the card. It bore the name of one of the judges of one of the benches provided for by the constitutions of both nation and State. He had a summer home on the mountain opposite and relatives in Rosewater, so there was nothing remarkable in his being in the little town on a rainy winter Sunday. Nevertheless, Gwynne's instinct of caution, more active than usual during the past year, stirred sharply.

"Show him in," he said. "And bring the whiskey—both Rye and Scotch."

This was the most perfect specimen of the bluff, hearty, breezy, almost ingenuous Westerner that Gwynne had encountered. The judge, who had been relieved of his hat and overcoat by the admirable Imura, advanced with both

hands outstretched, and Gwynne could do no less than surrender his, although he had never fancied any one less. The judge was a big man with a round jolly face, set with a sensual mouth, a pendulous nose, and merry twinkling eyes. Although possibly no more than fifty-five years of age, the baldness of his head had amplified the common noble domelike American brow: behind which Gwynne had so often groped and found nothing. This man was indubitably clever, and to a less educated eye than Gwynne's his face would appeal and fascinate. His magnetism was superlative.

"My dear Mr. Gwynne!" he exclaimed. "Believe me when I say that this is one of the most satisfactory moments of my life. I was forced to come to this God-forsaken hole last night, and had it not been for you I should have taken the morning train back to the city. But when I heard that you were in town—you were pointed out to me as we both left the train—I knew that my opportunity had come. And—my dear young gentleman—I throw away no opportunities; I throw away no opportunities."

By this time Gwynne had steered him into the largest of the chairs, and offered him his choice of the whiskies. The judge, after an instant's hesitation, accepted the Scotch; and Gwynne felt that he had a tactful and dangerous man to deal with.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the judge, and he smacked his lips. He inhaled the aroma of the cigar voluptuously. "But my dear old friend, Judge Leslie, whom I ran in to see for a few moments this morning, told me—with his customary humor—that you were as remarkable for the superior quality of your whiskey and tobacco as for the



many personal qualities that have so rapidly endeared you to the citizens of Rosewater."

"Thanks," said Gwynne.

The judge changed his tactics instantly. "I cannot beat about in the dark and merely turn myself loose in pleasant generalities, Mr. Gwynne," he said, gravely. "I am going to tell you at once that I am positive you are Elton Gwynne. Judge Leslie would give me no satisfaction this morning, but I needed none. I happened to be employed in old Colton's bank in my younger days—as secretary—and although that was a long time ago—a long time ago!—it came back to me, when I began to hear so much about our new rancher, that his full name was John Elton Cecil Gwynne, and that he was the only son of his mother. Or—if impressions are confused after so long an interval—I may have gathered the last fact from James Otis, whom I knew very well. He and Hi, indeed, I may honestly say, were among my few intimate friends, despite some disparity in years. So, I have a double interest and, I modestly hope, claim upon you. The former at least has been accentuated since yesterday, when your likeness to Hi struck me very painfully. You are a vast improvement, I grant, for Hi was as ugly as mud and as cross as two sticks, but the resemblance is acute, odd as it may appear. Those things are very subtle, very subtle."

Gwynne had heard the keys of his secret weakness tinkle for a full bar, but while it improved his humor it did not cloud his judgment, and he applied himself to finding out the purpose of the man's visit.

"I regret very much that I have come too late to know any of my male relatives," he said, affably. "Hiram Otis, from all I hear, was an able man, if somewhat soured,

and his unfortunate brother one of the most brilliant lawyers of his day. Terrible thing, this reckless drinking in San Francisco. I was told yesterday that when—a few years ago—an editor was sent out from New York to assume charge of one of your most flourishing dailies, he made the entire staff go down to Los Gatos and take the Keeley cure. Then, for a time, he had *relays* of sober men, at least, but until then he had felt himself a lonely Philistine—besides taking a hand in every department of the "shop," even setting type at times. But it's a fascinating old town, all the same. Too fascinating, I fear." And he managed to fetch a remorseful sigh.

The judge, who had laughed heartily at the anecdote, dismissed his twinkle for a moment, and looked at the young man with concern.

"For God's sake," he said, softly, "don't tell me that you have inherited that microbe."

"Oh no, indeed!" said Gwynne, cheerfully. "I never could take to drink now—a man's character is pretty well formed at thirty-two, I fancy, and I scarcely ever touch spirits when alone—prefer the lighter wines. Only, as San Francisco is so convivial, one naturally imbibes a good deal, especially with friends addicted to the 'cocktail route'—and I am afraid I shall have to give up the city for the present and stick to work."

"The judge tells me that your legal powers are really amazing—that you have accumulated more law in four months—"

"Tut! Tut!" cried Gwynne, springing to his feet and reaching the table in a stride. "Have some more whiskey, judge. And don't flatter me any more. I am afraid that vanity is my besetting weakness—"

"Thank God it is not the other!" said the older man, fervently. "And vanity keeps the heart younger than anything I know of. Lose the power of being tickled by a compliment and inflated by success, and you lose the salt of life. But I am delighted that you have taken to the law. I know your English career like a book, and although I do not pretend even to guess at the motives which induced you to fling aside not only the most promising career in England, but one of the noblest of her titles, I may say, sir—and I may speak for my fellow-citizens, the whole million of them—I am deeply flattered, and gratified, that, whatever your motive, which could only be an honorable one, you have chosen this fair State as the theatre of your future triumphs. I hope I shall see you beside me on the bench—unless, to be sure, you have higher ambitions than the mere practice of law."

"The first men in the country have been lawyers," said Gwynne, politely. "Why aspire higher?"

"Why, indeed? But I think you will. The law frequently leads either to one of the benches or into the more active field of politics. And you—with your enormous energies—you will never be content with the law, pure and simple, no matter how brilliant a reputation you might achieve."

"But honest lawyers are so rare!" exclaimed Gwynne, boyishly. "I do believe I should be an honest one. That, at least, is the intention I have set beside my ambition. I am ambitious, judge, as no doubt you have divined, and the prospect of being shelved among the lords sickened me. I wanted to make a career for myself, so cut the whole business and came here where my American properties were. Besides, as it happened, I inherited practically

nothing with which to keep up my English estates. There! You have my reasons, judge, and you are welcome to them. Titles without money are mere embarrassments. Still, I really should have left, had it been otherwise—I am certain I should. I never could stand the inaction of the Upper House. Nor do I care for those compensatory honors that my position and family influence might have secured for me. And now I feel more the American every day. I have even grown keen on making money—which I rather disdained at home; for the matter of that, thought little about it. You may not know that I am—in partnership, as it were, with my mother and cousin—putting up a large Class A building in San Francisco?"

He inferred that there was little about him the judge did not know, but accepted the interested "Ah!" and rhapsodized over his new interests. The Judge listened with a benignant smile and a twinkling eye, every once in a while giving the tip of his long fleshy nose an abrupt shove, as if it impeded his breathing.

"Just so!" he exclaimed. "Just so! It is the Otis blood. No better pioneer blood in the State. Jim was the wild one. The others were as steady as rocks. Their father and grandfather—your ancestors, sir—helped to make this great State what it is. Their names will always be honored in the annals of California. Terrible pity Jim and Hi got away with so much. If they'd hung on as your mother and her mother did, Miss Isabel would be one of the heiresses. But she seems able to take care of herself, and with that face and form, I guess she can redeem her fortunes any way she chooses. I hear that young Harry Hofer can't talk of anything else."

Gwynne wondered if this were what the judge had come

for, but exonerated him, concluding that he was merely rambling on in the hope of an opening.

"No doubt!" he said, heartily. "Miss Otis could marry any one she pleased. One of the best titles in England was hers for the asking, by-the-way. But like myself she is too good an American—shall I say Californian?—to live anywhere but here. She is immensely successful with her chickens, and we shall all make money on this new deal—I am certain of that."

"No doubt, no doubt. Things are booming in San Francisco. You'll get a huge rent from a building of that size—in time. Pity it has to be divided among three of you. And there will be a big mortgage to pay off first, I suppose; and it is in a very precarious district, a very precarious district." And once more the twinkle retired and he gazed dreamily at the fire.

"Oh, even golden apples have to ripen. And I have taken every precaution against fires. Have some more whiskey, Judge."

"Don't care if I do." Gwynne knew that the Scotch scalded a throat caressed these many years with the oily rye, and put as little seltzer in it as he dared. But the judge sipped it heroically. Suddenly the twinkle danced back to his eye as he turned it upon Gwynne.

"You can't delude me!" he cried. "You can't, sir. I know you intend to go in for politics. Nothing else would ever satisfy your genius. Own up, now."

"Well," said Gwynne, modestly. "I have thought of it. After my five years are up, of course—makes one feel rather like a convict. Meanwhile I can make some headway with the law: or, shall I say, build up a reputation that may be useful to me when I am able to run for office."

"Ah! Just so! Great pity you were ever discharged from your American indigenate. Then one year in California would settle the matter. Which of our parties makes the strongest appeal to you?"

Gwynne's eyes had contracted and he was staring at the stove. But his abstraction was too brief to be noticed, and he answered in a confidential tone, "Well, Judge, to tell you the truth—" And then he stopped and laughed.

"I see. You think one is about as bad as the other."

"Well, I am afraid that is it."

"Oh, my boy, they're not nearly as bad as they are made out to be—our American politics. Judge Leslie is dotty on that subject, and so are a good many of the other old fossils of Rosewater. I don't say but that San Francisco would be the better for a good spring cleaning, but the State's not nearly so bad as it's painted, not nearly so bad as it's painted."

He delivered his repeated phrases with an unctuous indulgent roll that made Gwynne long to grind his teeth. But the prospective American merely raised an interrogative eyebrow. "I don't hear much good in any direction," he murmured.

"Of course, I can understand that you have seen through Tom Colton, and that he has appalled you as much as the fossils. He's in a hurry, and if he isn't mighty careful the machine will throw him down. For all his affected simplicity he's too fond of the limelight: loves to see his name in print; and when he makes a donation to a charity or an improvement scheme he uses up all the fireworks in the State."

"I was under the impression that he was in high favor with the district Boss—"

"The district Boss is getting old, and Tom, one way or another, has acquired a great influence over him; but I happen to know that he doesn't stand any too well with the State Democratic Boss."

"If Tom were really earnest in his reforms, really had the interest of the common people at heart—although I never saw common people so well off in my life—but the point is that if Tom were really sincere he might form an independent party."

"Well, he can. It won't do him any good. It wouldn't do even you any good to work up a reform party, and your abilities are to his as a thousand to one. In fact a man like yourself would have far less chance. They would let Tom amuse himself, but they would find you really dangerous, and the upshot would be that the two parties would unite and crush you. Crush you flat. You might be a George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Abraham Lincoln rolled into one, and you would emerge from the swift and simultaneous impact of those two cast-iron walls flatter than the sole of your boot. Even if you made a good running on a reform wave, so much the worse. Reform waves merely serve the purpose of making some poor devil conspicuous and recklessly optimistic, then subside and leave him high and dry—at the mercy of the ever-recuperating machine. It's enough to make a man wish he'd never been born. I've seen it more than once. There's only one of two results. They are either so disgusted with politics that they stay out of them for the rest of their lives, or they pick themselves up and make a bolt for the machine they think most likely to give them a career. Look at some of our most illustrious incumbents. Great bluff on the outside—which the machine don't mind one

little bit—and the best sort of a party man inside; walking a chalked line with no rebellious wings on his feet. Wings don't grow on clay. But they are right, Mr. Gwynne, and not because they are wrong, either. In this great country organization is absolutely essential, and in all vast complicated organizations some chicanery will creep in. But take them all in all, American politics are not half as bad as they are painted, not half as bad as they are painted."

"Well, that is a relief. You certainly should know. But what of the great corporations that rule this State—as well as the country? The State Democratic or Republican Boss is president or treasurer of one of them, is he not? I haven't taken the trouble to be very specific as yet. My time is so far off. Of course I do not need to be told that organizations, trusts, or whatever you like to call them, are inevitable—because they are in the line of progress; and unabused, they would be as much to the advancement of the individual as of the country. But they have been abused, from all I can make out—quite shockingly. I am taking the course on 'The Law of Corporations' at the University, partly because I want to understand so vital a question as thoroughly as possible—and partly—well—at least, I fancied I should—for a time—for what money there might be in it— But really!"

"Oh, I don't say that some trusts are not reprehensible, and the sooner they are exposed the better. But they are sensational cases. The majority of the great complex aggregations of capital are monuments to American genius and progress; I am sure that if you waste any time on the yellow press you know how to discount it. Some of even the best of the trusts may have swollen to a size that renders

them practically unmanageable, as well as injudiciously provocative of much jealousy and unrest. But the principle is sound, as you have admitted, and the great law of adjustment will correct all that is undesirable, and in a very few years. Meanwhile, get rich yourself, Mr. Gwynne. I'm delighted to learn that corporation law has appealed to you so strongly, for the money is there. I'm glad I came. I'd like to do one of your blood a good turn, to say nothing of yourself. Perfect yourself in corporation law—and Leslie says you accumulate more rapidly than any hundred ordinarily well-equipped men one might name—and I can put you in the way of clearing a hundred thousand a year."

"*Could* you?"

"Yes, sir. What the great corporations want, and want badly, even with all the good legal talent they've got, is an attorney of extraordinary abilities, and these you have. I understand that the legal luminary of that reform set in San Francisco has offered to take you into his office. That's about as great a compliment as even you could have, but there's nothing in it. They're playing a losing game. They ought to win, but they won't. The San Francisco Boss may be what we elegantly term a shyster lawyer, but there never was as clever a one; and there's no trick he doesn't know. He'll beat them at every turn. You'd only make one more of that estimable Don Quixote band. Don't waste your youth. Study corporation law with all your might and main, and *I'll* place you where you'll make a big income from the start—and it 'll grow bigger every year. Then when your turn comes to vote and run for office—why, the whole field will be open to you to pick and choose from. Corporations are not ungrate-

ful, and with a mighty one behind you, I guess you wouldn't whistle for anything, long."

Gwynne regarded the thin sole of his house shoe with so rueful a countenance that the judge laughed outright. "Have you really had thoughts of working up a reform party?" he cried, the dancing imps in his eyes almost escaping.

"Well, I may have dreamed a bit that way. You see, I come of a family of reformers." And he gave the judge a rapid sketch of the part his English forefathers had played in the great reform acts of their country. The judge nodded sympathetically.

"Just so. I understand your point of view perfectly. Perfectly. But those great movements in England are matched here by spasms only. This country is too big and too heterogeneous. Don't set yourself between two cast-iron walls, Mr. Gwynne, because when they do get a concerted move on, they fly like hell. Join either of the parties, and you will find not only that it is not half as bad as it is painted, but that it accomplishes far more good than harm, many real reforms, that are systematically ignored by the press."

"I thought you said that reforms were impossible in this country."

"Oh, bless my soul, no. That would mean that we were going straight to the dogs. Reforms are going on every minute. The country is more tolerable and civilized every decade. What I mean is that no reform can be accomplished until the time is ripe for it. That is the reason why our spasms amount to nothing. They are always premature. But if you really want to do this country a service throw in your lot with the regulars. You would

always be an influence for good, and when you saw the first opening for the correction of some crying abuse, you would have powerful machinery at hand to work with. What you want to do, Mr. Gwynne, is to become a powerful factor in the machine, not waste your time on windmills."

"Which machine?" asked Gwynne, ingenuously. "I don't fancy I could ever make up my mind. They seem precisely alike to me."

"Well," said the judge, slowly, although he brushed the tip of his nose aside with more violence than usual. "I don't like advising, particularly a young man of your distinguished abilities and achievements. But I really think I am better able to advise you than Leslie, and certainly every man of us should feel a sense of responsibility to the old Otis—and Adams!—blood. I will say frankly that in your place I should join the party that owns this State—and shows no signs of letting go; in other words, the Republican. I can well understand, that having been a Liberal—and to the extent of renouncing your titles!—the Democratic would appeal to you. But don't waste your time, Mr. Gwynne. You are thirty-two. You don't want to throw away the next ten years on a losing game, and then, tired out, arrive nowhere. You would fight so hard that all your energies would be second-rate by that time. You want to begin right now and swim with the tide. Nurse your great energies for the exactions of the victorious career. You'll need them. And need them fresh."

"That sounds like good advice, but the whole political game appals me when I consider that it will be six years before I can even run for the House of Representatives—"

"True! True! Pity your parents didn't lose you

But everything turns out for the best. Meanwhile, you can make name and fortune as a corporation lawyer. And you can't have too much money in this world, sir. You can't have too much money in this world."

It was on the tip of Gwynne's tongue to ask him bluntly what corporation he had in mind, but not only did his already boiling humor recoil from the indignity of a deliberately worded bribe, but he doubted if it would be proffered so early in the game. He had a very clever man to deal with; it was not likely he would make the mistake of a direct approach. Gwynne flattered himself that he looked as ingenuous as Tom Colton, but as he had seen through the complacent judge, it was possible that the judge might entertain suspicions of a man with his reputation. He was glad he had not spoken when his visitor rose abruptly to his feet.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "I shall miss my train if I don't hurry. And heaven forbid that I spend another night in this mud-hole. My address is on my card—when do you come down again?"

"There is a lecture at Berkeley on Wednesday—"

"Good! Now, you will dine with me next Wednesday night—and I hope on many other nights. We must have several long talks—and all about your future, young man. I am too old to talk about my own, but I remember what I was at your age. Tactful, hey? But no," dropping his voice gravely. "I want to help you. And I can. Whatever branch of the law you specialize upon, you must leave Rosewater and come to San Francisco. I can place you in an office—even should you decide upon general practice—that will carry you swifter and further than our reform friend can, because he is playing a losing game—a losing



game, sir. But we'll talk of all that later. I must hasten."

Gwynne escorted him to the head of the staircase, where he resisted an impulse to kick him down, then, after a hasty glance into the dictionary, encased himself in rubber and went up the hill to the home of Judge Leslie. He was to dine there, and it was but a quarter-past four, but what he had to say and ask would not keep for an hour and three-quarters.

IV

ON his way to the house he decided that he could not confide even to Judge Leslie that he had been singled out as likely spoil by the "grafters." No doubt that in a way it was a compliment to his abilities, this early-conceived determination to whisk him out of the reform field and engross his abilities, killing two birds with one stone. Probably he would be approached in a similar manner very often, until he became a definite quantity, and in time would grow accustomed to it; and callous. But at present he was hot and sickened, the more so as he felt that he had received a new impulse to believe in himself. These vast corporations—the railroad, street railways, lighting, and telephone companies, were the ones that dictated to San Francisco, and were supposed to have debauched the Board of Supervisors, all of them small laborers, elevated by the Boss to serve his ends—counted their capital by the millions; in one case, at least, by the hundred million. They had already bought much of the best talent in the country, and they wasted no time on the second-rate. Gwynne could easily guess in whose teeming and orderly brain the scheme to seduce and attach himself had been shaped, and, with the American contempt for the perspicacity of any foreigner, had selected this judge, with his breezy direct tactful manner, as certain to edge the newcomer into the fold. To Gwynne the only saving grace



in the whole interview was that he had not been tempted. Had he been he should have felt utterly demoralized, disposed to take himself at the valuation of the business-like unsentimental brains in power.

He found his judge awakening from a nap before his library fire and dusting the crumbs from his beard.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," the old gentleman began, then stopped short. "What is the matter?" he asked, anxiously. "Sit down."

"What does indigenate mean?"

"Why—a purely technical term for citizenship."

"A friend of yours called upon me to-day, on the strength of having known the Otises, and remarked that it was a pity I was ever discharged from my American indigenate."

"That you renounced American citizenship upon coming of age. It is a pity."

"But I remember doing no such thing. I did no such thing. I certainly should remember it."

"You mean that you made no formal act of renunciation of your American birthright, obtained no certificate of British nationality?"

"I did nothing of the sort. It is possible that my father did it for me—"

"Your father could do nothing." Judge Leslie was staring at him. Suddenly he laughed. "You *are* British! I am almost inclined to believe you hopeless. How did I get the impression that you had formally expatriated yourself? From Isabel, who, no doubt, woman-like, jumped at the conclusion—having known you when you were more British still. And you never brought up the subject—"

"Don't regard me as wholly an idiot. I read the Constitution of the United States half a dozen times while making up my mind to come here, and it is not likely that Article XIV.—'All persons born in the United States, etc., are citizens of the United States, etc.'—escaped me. I consulted my solicitor, and he read me from some chapter on Expatriation, as plainly as may be, that the forfeiture of native citizenship was accomplished not only by a formal act of renunciation, but followed a long severance with the relations of the government under which the person was born, or—acceptance of service under a foreign government. Considering that I had left the United States when I was five weeks old, and had fought and bled for Great Britain, besides serving in her Parliament—where, of course I took my oath of allegiance—and that I had been an Englishman to every possible intent and purpose, even wearing my titles for some weeks, it seemed to me—and to my solicitor—that I would have rather a hard time obtaining an American passport."

The judge nodded. "Quite right. All the same, I can't understand why your father did not bring the question up when you attained your majority, or why you, an ardent Britisher, did not think of it yourself."

"You would understand if you lived among us for a few years. In the first place my being born in the United States was such a mere incident that it was rarely mentioned, and then in the most casual manner. I don't suppose my mother ever volunteered a piece of information in her life, and my father rarely gave a thought to any matter but sport. My grandfather probably disliked the idea—he detested America—at all events he never alluded to the subject, and was far too British to dream that the

child of British parents could be other than British were he born in heaven itself. I don't think the matter had entered my mind for ten years, when the subject came up the first night of Isabel's visit to Capheaton—and I stupefied every one by announcing that I had been born in America; but otherwise it made no impression upon them. It is quite possible that had there been any prospect of my becoming the heir, when I reached my majority, some member of the family would have recalled the fact of my birthplace; but Zeal was well then, his wife was bearing children rapidly, there was every reason to suppose she would have half a dozen boys. Do you mean to say that I have never been an Englishman?"

"Oh, you are all right as far as the British law goes. And you were a good and bona fide British subject for thirty years. Don't feel any discouragement on that score."

"Then am I an American citizen? Is there to be no long period of waiting and of comparative inaction?"

"I am not so sure. There is no provision of the Constitution so open to various construction. And none has been so variously construed. I could cite a hundred instances—that is, I could read them to you to-morrow. But I recall two, and they are fair samples. One child, born in the United States, of French parents, returned to France, and after serving his term in the French army wished to become an American citizen, and obtained his passport without difficulty. A full-grown American citizen went to Mexico and fought for Maximilian, and lost not only his own citizenship, but that of his children, who had been born in the United States. There you are, and there you are again, as dear old Dickens would say.

But I must think a minute." He transferred his gaze to the coals, and was silent for a few moments.

"There is a pretty strong case on both sides," he resumed, in a musing tone. "You left this country when an infant, you practically forgot it, you entered the service of Great Britain heart and soul, and achieved high distinction. You inherited a title and wore it as a matter of course. For thirty years you never set foot on American soil, nor at any time demanded the protection of the United States, as you might easily have done in your foreign wanderings. There is hardly a doubt that if England had gone to war with us at any time during the last ten years and needed your services you would have given them. However, that contingency did not arise, so let it pass. But with an unsympathetic State Department and an active enemy or two, all the other points cited would make up as clear a case of voluntary expatriation as any on record. But there is a pretty good balance on the other side. You *were* born in the United States, you *did not* renounce at any time your allegiance, you have the blood of two Presidents in your veins, and—here is the important point: you have been one of the heaviest tax-payers in California for thirty-two years. Now, as I have intimated, these expatriation cases have all been decided on their individual merits. I should advise you to go at once to Washington, and enlist the influence of the British Ambassador to get you personal and private interviews with the powers that be. Then plead your own case. One of two things will happen. Either there will be much hemming and hawing, and much virtuous and judicial weighing of your peculiar case, article by article, or the President himself will decide one way or another off-hand

—he being what he is. For that reason I think it would be well to approach him by degrees, let him digest it a bit. He may be delighted that you have thrown over your titles and your brilliant and promising career to become an American citizen, invite you to take the oath of allegiance forthwith, and order the State Department to issue a passport. On the other hand he may fly off at a tangent and be righteously indignant that a man with the blood of the Otises and Adamses in him, who had the good-fortune to be born on American soil, hesitated a moment after reaching man's estate—more particularly that he never gave the matter a thought. Nothing could be more problematical. I wouldn't bet a twenty-dollar gold piece either way. But, I repeat, you must go yourself. Otherwise the affair would hang on interminably. Moreover, you must tell no one the object of your journey. Tom Colton would pull every wire within his reach, and he is no mean rival, to postpone your admission to citizenship, and so, I fancy, would others."

He shot a keen glance at Gwynne. "I think I know who your visitor was, to-day, and what he came to Rosewater for. That speech of yours, and its effect on the crowd, never escaped the attention of the party bosses, and of course you are a marked man in this small community—to say nothing of your intimacy with the reform set in town. The judge, who started somewhere in this neighborhood as a poor boy, rose from various minor situations to be the secretary of Colton's bank, saved his dimes and studied law. So far so good; the average self-made American. The law leads a good many of us into politics and it wasn't long leading him. He was an invaluable party man, with that

bluff honest exterior, that superabundant magnetism, and that twinkling eye. The world always associates a fine upright nature with a twinkling eye. I have one myself and I believe that is the main reason why I have always been afraid to do wrong. Well, our friend got the bench when he wanted it, and he has been a mighty good friend to the corporation that put him there. And it has done well by him. He owns a fine house in San Francisco, entertains, goes into the best society, has visited Europe several times, and, although he is now rising sixty, continues to fool all but a few. He might climb higher and become a United States Senator, but the corporation finds him too useful here. He rather resents that, but they make the sacrifice worth his while. I can well conceive they have spotted you, and you may be sure there is little about you they don't know. Of course they have made up their minds you are erratic, and have not the least doubt that they can manipulate that loose screw. They have bought thousands, these ——— —— — ——

(it was not often the judge swore, but when he did he took some time) Grafters, that are debauching the country and will soon make it impossible for an honest man to live; and although they will no doubt have the grace to approach you with less brutal directness than commonly, I knew that was what they were after the moment that old rascal began to talk to me this morning. He never fooled me. Well, we'll fool him. You go to Washington and get your passport, and if you can't hasten matters don't let an outsider know what you are after. Plunge into society and let them think you need a change from California. Of course you will give your real name. Cat's

out, anyhow. Perhaps they will think you are on your way home to England. Flirt with the girls and be a frivolous young blood. The judge asked you to dinner, I suppose? I thought so. You would meet more than the judge; if not the first time, then the second and third. Write him a note, telling him you are obliged to go south to take a look at your mother's ranch. Then obey a sudden impulse and go East by the southern route. In Washington be seen as much with your ambassador as possible. I don't think these rascals will suspect, for they take for granted that you were duly 'discharged from your American indigenate'—I can hear him! If they did there would be the devil to pay, but I don't think they will. However, don't waste any time."

Gwynne was staring at the fire, his inner being chaos, but he replied in a moment that he would start for Washington on the following day.

[redacted]

[redacted]

the difficulties of keeping the channel and avoiding the shoals and mud-banks obliterated by the risen waters. It amused her to imagine herself out there, while dwelling pleasurably, in a doubled consciousness, upon the warm red tints of her room. Her dreams were barely disturbed by the unknown interloper, but they were shattered a moment later by Gwynne's voice and rapid step in the hall.

She had intended to greet him with a cool hauteur after his neglect of nearly a month, but she could not rise in time; and, enveloped in a mass of hair, spread over a yard of the floor, it was impossible to be dignified. So she resolved to be charming.

"I had to come in the back way like a tramp and leave my oil-skins in the kitchen," he announced, abruptly, as he entered. "Don't get up. I have always wanted to see your hair down. So did Jimmy, I remember. Did he?"

"Certainly not. Neither would you if you had not chosen such an extraordinary time to call. I am delighted to see you once more after all these years, but—what on earth possessed you?" His eyes were glittering, although he had dropped his lids, and he did not sit down, but moved restlessly about the room.

"Your mother is much better," said Isabel, tentatively.

"Oh yes, and she is looking forward to her motor trip, and telephoned this morning that her room was a mass of flowers. I fancy she is a bit touched by so much kindness, for she has not been half decent to any one but the Trennahans."

"Does she say anything about returning to England? She had it in mind—just after the earthquake."

"She has made one or two casual allusions to her return, but she never plans far ahead—does what takes her fancy at the moment. But this life will never suit her. I imagine she will go before long. London is in her blood. Now that she can live properly—will have all she can, or ought to want, when the building is paying, there is no object in her remaining here."

"How goes the building?"

"How can anything go in this infernal weather? The old shanties are down, and the contractor had a sort of tent erected and has done some work on the foundations. I should have come directly to California if I had had any idea of the money to be made by selling off my superfluous land and putting up that building. It might be finished, by this time. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I am only remodelling my own brain on business lines by slow degrees, and no echo of this building fever reached me in Europe. You will remember that I did write, while you were wandering about America, that Mr. Colton suggested it for both of us. If I did not dwell on the subject it was because I had a feminine horror of the mortgage — and no idea that you were so keen on making money."

"I am thinking principally of my mother. When a woman has always had the world I doubt if she can live long out of it. San Francisco is all very well for the young and adventurous, and for those with a strong sense of the picturesque, but I can imagine that to a woman of her age and experience——Do you know—" he burst out. "I don't know where I am. What an extraordinary thing heredity is! I doubt if most people, although they



would call that a platitude, realize that heredity is anything more than a telling word. There are times when I am sitting at my stove, surrounded by all those typical American men, who seldom mention a subject but politics and farming—for I tabû chickens—or the intensely local interests, more or less affected by politics,—there are times when I actually feel the nameless ambitious young fellow—not born in a log-cabin, perhaps, but next door to it—and endowed with that keen compact pioneer determination to stride straight to my goal, whether it is the White House or—well—the Presidency of a Trust Company. I forget—good God!—*Are* those years behind me in England? I have caught myself wishing that I had kept a scrap-book like other idiots. It escapes my memory altogether at times, that I have but to take a steamer out of New York to reach the top of civilization again in less than a week."

"Perhaps it suggests itself when you remember that with the income you can command before long, life in England will be more worth while."

"That was as nasty a one as you ever gave me! No one knows better than yourself what brought me to America, and that those conditions cannot be altered by money. Could I not have had Julia Kaye's fortune? You need not be nasty again! You forget that not only was I in love with her—or thought I was—but could have given her the equivalent. She would be the last to claim that she was to pay too high a price, even with me thrown in. If you don't beg my pardon I'll leave the house."

"I beg your pardon," said Isabel, hastily. She was thrilled with curiosity; she had never seen him so nearly

excited, with the exception of one memorable and painful moment. She fancied that she could see one of the barriers between them sway.

"It may be that this sudden prospect of wealth, or rather of a goodish income that would enable me to keep up a decent establishment in town, and a bit of a place somewhere in the hunting country, has upset my equilibrium, but it occurred to me this morning as I was splashing through the mud—I had to go out to the ranch—in fact it came over me with such a rush that I felt like Don Quixote, and every landmark looked like a windmill—what is England to-day but the very apex of civilization? The Mecca, the reward, of every man and woman with the breeding and the intelligence to appreciate it? The best of everything goes there, you have but to turn round to help yourself to an infinite variety—to be found piecemeal everywhere else on earth. And the very best is mine, by inheritance and personal effort. Why in thunder am I out here on this ragged edge of civilization struggling with almost primitive conditions?—elemental badness, sure enough! What is my object? Merely to bring about a set of conditions that exists in England to-day. I have them there. Why am I wading into filth up to my knees, for the sake of an alien race, when they are mine already?"

"But you had too full a measure. That was the reason you emptied the cup and turned your back. You wanted hard work—to use your gifts."

"What does it all amount to? Suppose I insidiously work up a reform movement in this State, and am shot into Congress over the head of the machine? Suppose my gifts are as extraordinary as I have been led to sup-

pose — ordinarily a man feels damned commonplace— and by force of those gifts I hold my own against the formidable organizations I shall encounter there at every turn? Suppose this reform spirit in the United States grows and strengthens, and I come along in time to benefit by it, and am landed in Washington—even in the White House? What of it? I had a thousand times rather be prime-minister in England—in other words the real head of eleven million square miles of the earth's surface, dictator to a good part of the world, for that matter. Your public men are servants—or ought to be, according to your Constitution. In England we render service by courtesy, and rule the roast. In this country every man in public life is not only at the mercy of his constituents, but in daily terror of having his head cut off by the man above him. Even the President has to be a politician above all things."

"You used to talk in England—as if you were not wholly swayed by personal ambition."

"It is not so difficult over there to conceive high and mighty ideals—fool yourself, if you like. But I'll be hanged if I can see myself baring my breast for poisoned arrows, with a seraphic smile on my lips, over here! It is all so crude! I want to be a main instrument in reform as much as ever— Oh yes! But I am not sure that one motive is not to make the life and the game more tolerable. And the everlasting machine! There won't be a day, inside or out of it, that I won't run up against every damnable meanness that human nature is capable of. I must handle these men, placate them—or get out. History has not yet failed to repeat itself. If I succeed, in favoring conditions, in forming a new party, I may

end as a boss myself! Exalted ideal! Inspiring thought! Better go home and live like a gentleman. I could have some sort of a career, and I have seen enough in this country to drive me towards the conclusion that there are worse things in life than curbing one's youthful ambitions a bit."

He was still striding up and down the room, his expressive hands as restless as his feet. The color was in his face and his eyes were blazing. There was a curious magnetism about him that Isabel had never been sensible of before, although she had heard much of it in England. It was as if his spirit were fully awake; at other times he appeared to live with his cool critical brain only, while his inner self, with its intense slow passions, slept. She wisely made no comment, and after shoving the books violently about the table he went on:

"You may argue that if public men were elected directly by the people and the President held office for one term of ten or fifteen years only, that a long stride would be made towards the millennium. But it is doubtful if even then, forty or fifty different tribes—for that is what your State and territory lines effect—could be managed without machinery, and machinery develops the lowest attributes in human nature. I saw enough of that in the few rotten boroughs we have left in England, but my imagination never worked towards the full and original development in this country. We have other faults; the serenest optimist would never deny them; but, faults or no faults, we crown civilization to-day. The richest man in America has not the least idea what it means to live like a gentleman in our sense. And there is no flaw in my appreciation of your country. In



many respects it is the most marvellous the world has known—but—I sometimes wonder if the pioneer blood in my veins is red enough to stand it. No matter what the most successful reformers accomplish, there will be no high civilization here in our time—no background. Unconsciously, or otherwise, I shall always have the goal of England in my mind—and if that is the case, why am I here? Isn't civilization the highest that man is capable of accomplishing, the best that Earth has to offer any of us? What sense is there in going back to the beginnings and plodding or fighting towards a goal you were born to? It's more than once I've felt like Don Quixote. The whole infernal country is a windmill—and a large percentage of its inhabitants are windbags."

"Of course you have a streak of Don Quixote in you. All men of genius have, I suppose. You felt that you had a mission—to pack a great deal into a convenient phrase. You could do nothing in England but sit down and sup with the elect. You would have choked very quickly. And if you went back you would not stay. You would not only be bored, but you know now how badly this country needs one disinterested man of genius."

"I am not disinterested. I never felt more selfish in my life."

"You have an immense capacity for disinterested statesmanship. Of course all motives, especially with the highly gifted, are complex. You have said yourself they would be fanatics otherwise. And you are far more American than you know, although you have just confessed that you do know it well enough at times. All your American ancestors may be living again in you. It was your own instinct, no influence of mine, that sent

you out here, filled with mixed but high ambitions. No full-blooded Englishman would ever do what you have done. Insanity and inebriety skip a generation. Why not Americanism? Heaven knows there is nothing American about your mother. And when the political clean-up comes, as it is bound to—"

"Oh, I am sick of this everlasting optimism: 'Everything is bound to come out all right,' 'God's own country,' and all the rest of it. I can understand it well enough out here, though. It is a wonder to me that any Californian has energy enough to care. Life is easy at the worst. The scoundrels batten unnoticed—although they are sending up the price of everything; and the most ungrateful and rapacious labor class on earth never get their deserts. The labor class hasn't a leg to stand on, so far as bare justice goes. Pity they can't have a taste of Eastern factories and wages and climate for a while. If it were not for its bay and the tremendous significance of its position opposite the Orient, California would be what it ought to be, the pleasure gardens of the world. No politics, no labor-unions, merely a succession of estates, big and little, where a man could live a happy animal existence for one-third of the year, after working the other two-thirds—that is a sane division. But if I stay here I work. And for what ultimate object? England, as sure as fate."

"You cannot possibly tell how you will feel twenty years hence—"

"Twenty years! That is a fair estimate, no doubt! I believe that the real secret of discontent has been the prospect of this cursed period of inaction. Nice substitute—coruscating as a blooming barrister; and it's mighty

difficult to travel along for four years without showing your hand. It requires a tact that I may or may not have. If I have it, there may be other depths of hideous guile, as yet undiscovered. I have had glimpses of them already. All these farmers that I am nursing? What if my beneficent virus works too quickly—before I can represent them? Some other fellow reaps the benefit; and when my turn comes, likely as not there will be a reaction. I've to keep and increase my hold on these men of every nationality under the sun, as well as upon the seasoned old Americans, lest they should break away from me. Nice job I've cut out." He hesitated a moment, but added: "Beastly idea to subject all to the same law. It should be ten years for immigrants, and one for the man-of-the-world anxious to take the oath of allegiance —not that I am frantic to take it."

"I never knew any one so keen for obstacles; and now that you have found more than you bargained for—"

"It's not the obstacles that daunt me. If I were only sure of accomplishing any result worth while, if I had the materials to work on—if I were sure I cared! The American is an unhatched Englishman, but he won't be hatched out in my time——I even long for the close compact drama of English life. Everything is spread over such a vast loose surface here. These four years through which I may—must stumble along with my hands tied, are a fair example. And it seems to me that I never go to bed without seeing a face on the dark trying to enunciate: 'What for?' 'Why?'"

He sat down suddenly on a chair in front of her and took his head in his hands. "Do you ever ask yourself those questions?" he demanded, abruptly.

Isabel nodded. He noted absently that she looked like an elf with her face half-hidden by her hair, and that he could see but one little black mole, but a narrow ring of blue about the dilated pupils of her eyes, the tiny dimple at the corner of her mouth. She wore a loose blue wrapper, and the wood fire leaped in high flames behind her. The storm was terrific. He suddenly realized that this was the only homelike room he knew outside of England. He felt as if nothing would ever give him peace again, but he was suddenly and overwhelmingly glad to be there—and comfortably alone with Isabel on this raging night. He stared at her until his own pupils dilated, but she replied more tranquilly than she felt.

"*Cui bono* is the motto on Earth's coat of arms. The only thing that saves us is that we don't see it all the time. There are long intervals in which we eat and sleep and dance and love and play at politics and enjoy the storm—and our best companions."

"We certainly are not here to spend our lives preparing for another world. Otherwise there would be no sense in the complexities of civilizations. A man could do that much in a cave. It is merely the diabolism of instinct that prompts the young to believe that the race is all. Certainly love is not the only source of happiness. I have been ecstatically happy when writing—thinking, in the fever of composition that I was dashing out the finest thing in literature. I have been happy under fire, or excited enough to think so. And I have felt enough exultation with exaltation to make happiness when I have been on a platform and carried a hostile crowd off its head and to my feet. If two people were indescribably mated—I don't know—"

"Why not deliberately accept the doctrine that there is a purpose, even if you are not permitted to read the riddle of life—"

"All very well, but what have politics to do with it? You may answer that a man should lay up all the credits he can, and that he can possibly get more by cleaning out the political trough than in any other way. If those are my lines I suppose I shall work along them, but my higher faculties whisper that to live this life on the intellectual plane, fighting for your country when necessary, is the rational existence for those that have the luck to be born to the good things of the old civilizations. Here they don't know any better, or if they do they can't help themselves. If that plane isn't meant to live on, why is it there? Has a man the right deliberately to step off the high plane upon which a long succession of circumstances have planted him—pull up his roots and plant them in a virgin soil?"

"Perhaps it is his duty to go where he is most needed—where his riper instincts and experience—"

"Your arguments are always good, otherwise I should not be here arguing with you. What do you really think of love?"

She jumped with the suddeness of the attack, and then drew backward a little, for he was leaning towards her and she felt his masculine magnetism as she had never done before. It pulled and repelled her, fascinated and filled her with resentment. And she was fully alive to the romantic conditions, the wild night, the isolation, the vibrating atmosphere. But she replied, soberly:

"I don't think about it. I buried all that—"

"Chuck it on the dust-heap! It served its purpose: women should have some such experience in their first

youth as men have others. You are the better for it, because you worked off on the poor devil all the morbid and ultra-romantic tendencies that were spoiling your life. But let it go at that. It was no more love than my first Byronic madness for one of my mother's friends when I was sixteen—"

"You were thirty when you were in love with Mrs. Kaye. And she was not even your second—nor your tenth, no doubt."

"Quite right. I do not understand and shall waste no time on the effort. All men run pretty much the same gamut. That attack was the most commonplace sort of passion, no madness in it, no idealization, no sense of mating—"

"And how, may I ask, do you expect to know when you really do fall in love—"

"I'll know, all right. I wish you would put up your hair. You look uncanny, not like a woman at all. You have too many sides. I like you when you are human and normal."

"If you think my hair in its proper place will accomplish that result—my hair-pins are up-stairs on my dressing-table—"

He disappeared instantly. When he returned she was standing and coiling her hair about her head. Her sleeves were loose and the attitude bared her arms. As Gwynne handed her the pins, one by one, he stared, fascinated; but when she had finished and shaken down her sleeves, returning his stare with two polar stars, he turned his back suddenly and resumed his tramp of the room.

"I have changed my mind," he said, abruptly. "I had intended to marry you on any terms, merely because you

suited my critical taste. But I believe that if I married you in that way I should beat you or kill you—or you would kill me. You are capable of anything. Love would square matters with us—nothing else."

"Then is the engagement broken?" asked Isabel, placidly. She did not sit down, but stood with a foot on the fender.

He relieved his feelings by kicking a stool across the room, then came and stood in front of her.

"Could you love me?" he demanded.

"I am not the village prophet."

"Have you made up your mind you will not marry me?"

"Oh yes—that."

"Because you couldn't love me, or because you are determined not to marry?"

"I won't feel and suffer and have my life torn to tatters when I can keep it whole! I had rather marry you without love, if I believed myself indispensable to your success in life."

"Much you know about it. I won't have you on any such terms."

"You are in no imminent danger. Heavens, what a wind! You must stay here to-night. If the spare room is too cold you can sleep on this divan."

"If that is a polite hint, I am ready to take it. I have been here long enough."

"Oh, but I mean it. I will not hear of you riding back in this pitch darkness. You would be more likely to go into the marsh than not. You can return to Rosewater so late to-morrow that Sister Ann will infer you have made a morning call."

"I shall return to-night. It was as dark when I

came, and I am not altogether a fool. Neither is my horse."

"But you are not so familiar with the road," murmured Isabel, irrepressibly.

"That is the one decent thing you have said to me to-night. It is these sudden lapses into the wholly feminine that save me from despair. What a night for romance, and you and I sparring like two prize-fighters! That is as far as we have ever got. If you would ever let me know you—sometimes I have an odd fancy that I can see a lamp burning in your breast, and that if ever I got at it, and searched all the nooks and crannies of your strange nature by its light, I should love you as profoundly as it is possible for a man to love a woman."

"I am afraid it is only a taper in a cup of oil. At all events it is not a search-light, even to myself. I fancy people only seem complicated to others when they do not wholly understand themselves."

"Do you understand yourself?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Are you perfectly satisfied that you never could love me?"

She reddened and her sensitive mouth moved, but she brought her teeth together. "That has nothing to do with it."

"Everything!"

"Nothing!"

"Do you mean to tell me that you are literally contented with your life as it is?—living out here alone with nothing to do but read and look after those confounded chickens? You have the most romantic temperament I have ever met, and the way you gratify it would make an elephant laugh."

"I dream and think of the future."

"Future? You saw what that amounted to when you were in town—"

"I have shaken off the impression. It must have been that I had too much at once—and the purely frivolous, which offended my puritanical streak—"

"You don't like the Bohemian crowd any better."

"There are plenty of others. When I am ready I shall make the plunge and forbid myself to shrink from realities—"

"And the only people that will interest you will be those deep in public affairs. A woman to be a political power must be married. Otherwise she becomes the worst sort of feminine intriguer."

"I am interested in the women that are interested in the improvement of all things."

"And what is their ultimate aim, for heaven's sake? The franchise. Do you mean to tell me that you intend to become a Club woman? I had sooner you wrote a book."

"I have no intention of doing either—"

"In other words you are a plain dreamer, and a selfish one at that—"

"I try not to be selfish. I visit no ill-humor on any one —but you!—and I do good where I can. I should be more selfish if I ran the risk of making—some man unhappy in matrimony."

"Well, I'm sick of the subject. I came to say good-bye for a time. I'm off to the south to-morrow, and then east on business. I don't know when I shall be back—Oh, you can turn white—I can make you turn white!"

"What do you expect when you fire such a piece of news at me? What is behind this?"

"I have told you enough."

"Don't you trust me?"

"Oh, you can keep a secret. I don't know that I want to tell you."

"Very well."

"Oh, well, it would be beastly ungrateful in me not to. I have had a hint that, not having de-Americanized myself formally when I came of age, I may still be an American citizen. Judge Leslie has advised me to go to Washington and find out, and I am going. Are you really so interested?"

"Oh yes," said Isabel, softly. "I am interested! I have been afraid you might become discouraged and disgusted. Four more years would be a long time. Are you glad?"

"I don't know whether I am or not. When it comes to taking the oath of allegiance to the United States—if that is sprung on me in Washington—I shall feel more like taking the next steamer for England and making my oaths there. It is a little too sudden."

"All this hesitation and doubt are natural enough until you are settled down, and become too accustomed to the country to think of anything else—"

"I accept the balm. But I have less hesitation than you imagine—whatever the doubt and disgust. And I really believe the secret of my unrest is you! Good heavens! *Do* I love you—*already*—that would be the last straw!"

He was staring at her, and something in his face blinded her. She turned cold from head to foot; but she moved her glance to the baskets on the mantel-shelf, and replied, quietly:

"It will take some time for you to know whether you are

in love again or not. You have seen me too constantly —barring the last month. I have become in many ways necessary to you. When you move to San Francisco, as I am convinced you will, and have many other resources ——propinquity is all there is to ninth-tenths of what we call love——and then a little more kills it! Even if I were under the same delusion as you are I should not yield to it."

"I do love you," he said, as slowly and clearly as he was capable of enunciating. But his voice was hoarse, and she was sensible, without turning her head, that he was rigid. "It is different—quite different. I am willing to wait, however. I understand your hesitation. When I return—"

"Doubt of the reality of your—well—"

"Love," said Gwynne, grimly.

But Isabel could not bring herself to utter the word. "One way or the other, it does not alter my determination not to marry."

"Let that rest for a while. What I want to know is, could you—do you love me?"

"Oh, I don't know! I only know I don't want to. You have a tremendous influence—you have made every one else seem commonplace and uninteresting—I have resented very much your neglect this last month. I am willing to tell you all this—also, that I have dreamed, imagined myself in love with you. But I am convinced that if you let me alone I shall get over it."

"I have no intention of letting you alone."

She moved backward suddenly, and he laughed. "I wouldn't touch you with a forty-foot pole," he said, roughly, "unless you wanted me. That, perhaps, shows how far

gone I am. But precious little you know about men. Or yourself. If I kissed you this minute you would succumb—"

He turned suddenly and was down the hall and had slammed the kitchen door behind him before she realized that she was actually alone, that he meant to leave the house. For a moment she clutched the edge of the mantel-piece in a passion of relief and regret. Then her femininity was swept aside by her hospitable instinct and vehement fear. She ran down the hall and into the kitchen. But even his rain garments and boots were gone. She opened the back door and peered out into the inky darkness. A light was moving in the stable. The rain was falling in a flood and the wind almost drove her backward. But she gathered up her gown and ran as fast as she could make headway to the stable. He was alone, and tightening his horse's saddle-girths by the light of a dark lantern. He gave her a bare glance and went on with his work.

"You must not go!" She was forced to scream. "You shall not. Why, you are mad. The marsh—such conventionality is ridiculous. I refuse to recognize it."

He rose to his feet and led his horse outside. But before he could vault to the saddle she caught his arm and dragged him backward. "You shall not go! You shall not!" She could hardly hear the sound of her voice. But she heard his, and there was nothing in either storm or darkness to blunt the sense of touch. For a moment she felt as if the whole had never been halved, as if they two were youth incarnate; and his arm was like vibrating iron along her back. She thought he was going to kiss her and dazedly moved her head towards him. But he cried into her ear instead:



"I stay if you marry me to-morrow."

"No, no, no!" Her will sprang through her lips, and before it was beaten down again she saw a spark of light engulfed in the dark, and stood alone in the storm, wondering if the world had turned over.

VI

"*Monday Morning.*

"THIS is merely to announce that I survived the marsh, and that upon my return we will resume where we left off last night. E. G."

Isabel received this note early in the morning. That night she had accepted an invitation of some weeks' standing, and was established in the old Yorba mansion on Nob Hill. She anathematized her cowardice, but solitude was beyond her endurance for the moment. She had made up her mind that she would not think of Gwynne at all, much less give herself opportunities to miss and desire him; and her will, reinforced by conditions, was strong enough at times to persuade her that she hated him.

And there was nothing in the Trennahan household to try her nerves, everything to soothe them. Although the old buff walls and terrible carpets of Mrs. Yorba's day had gone long since and the house had been completely refurnished, it looked like a home, not a museum. Trennahan had taken his family to Europe many times, and they had brought back much that was rare and beautiful; but nothing stood out obtrusively, not even a color. They entertained constantly in a quiet way, and if Magdaléna was far too Spanish to seek out the clever of all sets, and Trennahan too indifferent, at least Isabel met

daily such of the *haute noblesse* as were not completely fossilized, and many men that interested her well enough. Moreover, as Mrs. Trennahan now had a grown-up daughter, she was obliged to take her to the cotillons and other routs given under the merciless supervision of the Leader. Isabel accompanied her as a matter of course, and when she declined an invitation her guest was at liberty to go with the ever faithful Mrs. Hofer.

For three weeks Isabel did little thinking. She went to the ranch once a week for the day only, spent an occasional hour with Lady Victoria. Even then she was barely reminded of Gwynne. She was busy during every moment while in the country, and her relative was no more communicative than of yore. Only once did Victoria remark casually, that, by a sort of poetic justice, Gwynne was detained in the south with a sprained ankle, and was hurling maledictions at fate from the classic shades of Santa Barbara. Isabel grudgingly admired the restraint with which he denied himself the possible solace of correspondence with herself, and it crossed her mind once or twice that the young man might have the understanding of women that proceeded from instinct, if not from study. But she deliberately dismissed him, and although his name was frequently mentioned in her presence, she soon ceased to turn cold, and forced him to flit with a hundred others across the surface of her mind.

For the first time in her life she flirted desperately, and with others besides young Hofer. She was quite wickedly indifferent to consequences, and was inspired to woo the fickle goddess of popularity. The peace and charm and intellectual relief of the Trennahan home did much to modify her shrinking from realities, and the effort to

please, and the abandonment to the purely frivolous instincts of youth, were the only aides her beauty needed to achieve that popularity she had abstractly desired the night Gwynne brought her the stars. She no longer desired it at all, but she disguised this fact, and reaped the reward.

Moreover, although her analytical faculty slept in the darkest wing of her brain, the mere fact that she was stormily loved and desired by a man to whom she was powerfully attracted, that for a moment she had been awake and eager in his embrace, had warmed her blood and given her an insolent magnetism that she had never possessed before.

Through Mr. Colton she received a formal request from Gwynne to dedicate the Otis Building—named in honor of the creator of the family fortunes—on the day the last of the foundation-stones was laid. In company with half a hundred other young people in automobiles, she astonished South of Market Street, one beautiful spring day—the spring was making desperate assaults upon the lingering winter—and amidst much mock solemnity and many cheers, deposited into the chiselled crypt of one of the great concrete blocks upon which the building would rest, a strong-box containing three of Concha Argüello's Baja California pearls, several family daguerreotypes, and the original deed of sale which had transferred the property from the city to the first James Otis. When the ceremony was over the contractor shook hands with her approvingly.

"That's as good a place as any for a deed of sale in this here town," he remarked. "For no shake will ever budge them concrete pillars. They're down to bed-rock. And

no fire 'll ever crack them, neither. We'll begin on the steel frame to-morrow, and you must come down occasionally and cheer us up. It 'll be worth it. The Otis 's goin' to be the cock o' the walk. Better make up your mind to have them terra-cotta facings."

"Oh, they would not raise the rents, and would hardly be appreciated by their present neighbors," said Isabel, lightly. "I am going to send you a bottle of champagne to-night, and you must drink to the health of The Otis."

The man promised fervently that he would, and then after ordering beer from a neighboring saloon for the workmen, Isabel and her party motored out to the beach beyond the Cliff House, where a number of old street-cars had been converted into bath-houses, and disported themselves in the waves until it was time to rush home and make ready for the Mardi Gras ball.

This yearly function was given in the Institute of Art on Nob Hill, the wooden Gothic mansion with bow-windows, erected in the Eighties by a railroad millionaire who had barely survived his nimble victorious assault upon Fortune. His widow had presented his "monument" to Art, and now its graceful flimsy walls housed much that was valuable in canvas and marble, and more that was worthless. Once a year, on the eve of Lent, Society gave a Mardi Gras ball, and such of the artists as were known to the elect decorated the rooms, and contributed certain surprises. This year, partly out of compliment to the Leader and Miss Otis, partly because the old Spanish spirit had been roaming through its ancient haunts of late, the interior of the mansion was hung with red and yellow. Isabel, in full Spanish costume, led the grand march with young Hofer, who was dressed as a toreador, and

supported the jeers of his friends in the gallery with what fortitude he could summon: he was plump and pink and golden. The great room, surrounded with boxes draped with the colors of Spain and filled with women splendidly dressed and jewelled, was very gay and inspiring, and the masques flung confetti and had a squib for everybody with a salient characteristic. When the march finished, Isabel, who wore a half-mask of black satin, and her hair in two long braids plaited with gold tinsel, danced a Spanish dance by herself, alternating tambourine and castanets. She had practised it during the past week with a professional, and she gave it with all the graceful sexless abandon of those California girls, who, a hundred years before that night, were dancing out at the Presidio and Mission. She was the success of the evening as she had purposed to be, and went home with two proposals to her credit, and as gratified a vanity as ever titillated the nerves of an ambitious and heartless young flirt. It was not the first time that Isabel had deliberately elected to play a rôle and achieved so signal a triumph that she was beset with the doubt if she had not but just discovered herself. As she fell asleep in the dawn of Lent it was with the somewhat cynical reflection that perhaps she could make quite as great a success of the rôle of the statesman's wife were she to essay it.

The roads were still in too muddy and broken a condition for the long-projected automobile trip, and the Trennahans had decided to hire a special car and journey to Mexico, spending some time in Southern California. They urged Isabel to go with them, but she was sure that she had had all the respite she needed, nor would she neglect her chickens any longer. In truth she said good-



bye to the party, which included not only Lady Victoria, but several other congenial spirits, with a considerable equanimity. She was suddenly tired of them all and glad to go back to her solitudes.

Although she did not return with that exuberance of joy, which, upon former occasions had made her feel like a long-prisoned nymph restored to her native woodland, still she was more than content to be at home again, and sat on her veranda until darkness closed the long evening. Every trace of the winter's madness had vanished. The marsh was high and red above the fallen waters, the hills were green, the trees budding, wild flowers were beginning to show their heads. The scene, until the last ray of twilight had gone, leaving that dark formlessness of a California night with its horrid suggestion, was almost as peaceful as England.

For several days Isabel, from reaction after weeks of incessant gayety, and the heaviness of early spring, was too languid to find even her Leghorns interesting. She slept late, yawned through the day; and never had her hammock—swung on the porch at the beginning of spring—possessed so recurrent an attraction. At the same time she was conscious, under the physical inertia which had brought her mind to a standstill, that she avoided Rosewater lest she should be forced to talk of Gwynne. He was still in Santa Barbara, and it was likely that he would be persuaded to go with the Trennahans to Mexico. There was time enough to seek his passport, and Isabel could well imagine that his impatience was not uncontrollable. No doubt he understood by this time that he could expect no change in her, if indeed he had not dismissed the matter from his mind.



She was rudely shaken out of her apathy by a long telegram from him, dated at El Paso:

"I have come this far with the Trennahans. Go on to Washington to-day. Expect me any time now. But should I be detained will you go over to the ranch occasionally? Use old power of attorney should occasion arise. Glad you made the running you wanted at last. Better order terra-cotta facings for The Otis. Am told that two other buildings will go up shortly in neighborhood. Quite fit again. E. G."

The delight and relief this telegram induced, the subtle sensation of hope and flattery, not only routed torpidity, but lashed her into such a state of fury that she ran up to her bedroom and indulged in an attack of nerves. When it was over she faced the truth with the unshrinking clarity of vision she could summon at will. But if she was not as astonished as she thought she ought to be, she was no less angry, not only with herself, but with life for playing her such a trick. Less than ever did she want to marry, and cease to be wholly herself, to run the risk of disillusionment and weariness, and that ultimate philosophy which was no compensation for the atrophy and death of imagination. But no less did she turn appalled from the thought of a future without Gwynne. All her old vague plans were suddenly formless, and she felt that if she even faced the prospect of regarding the shifting beauties of the Rosewater marsh for the rest of her life, she would hate nature as much as she now hated her treacherous self. And none could divine better than she, that, present or dismissed, when a man has conquered a woman's invisible

and indefensible part she might as well give him the rest. He is in control. She has lost her freedom for ever. So strong was the feeling of mental possession that Isabel glanced uneasily about the room, half-expecting to see the soul of Gwynne; wondering inconsequently if it would descend to notice that her eyes were red. But she vowed passionately that she would not marry him. If she had to be unhappy, far better unhappy alone and free, with some of her illusions undispelled. She had seen no married happiness that she envied, even where there was a fine measure of love and philosophy. Even Anabel had come to her one day in town, looking rather strained and worn, and, in the seclusion of Isabel's bedroom, had confessed that the constant exactions of a husband, three children, and migratory servants "got on her nerves," and made her long for a change of any sort. "And there are so many little odd jobs, in a house full of children," she had added, with a sigh. "And they recur every day. You can no more get away from them than from your three meals; I never really have a moment I can call my own. Of course I am perfectly happy, but I do wish Tom were not in politics and would take me to Europe for a few years."

And if Anabel was not happy—wholly happy—with her supreme capacity for the domestic life, how could she hope to endure the yoke? She with her impossible ideals and theories? Not that they were impossible; but to anticipate, in this world, the plane upon which the more highly endowed natures dared to hope they were to dwell in the next, absolute freedom was necessary. Isabel's theory of life—for women of her make—had not altered a whit, but the beckoning finger had lost its vigor. That left her with no material out of which to model a future for this plane

—which, of course, was another triumph to the credit of the race.

She knew that Gwynne had conquered, that she had really loved him, as soon as he had ceased to play upon her maternal instincts. She had casually assumed at the time that her interest in him was decreasing, but in this day of retrospect, she realized keenly that it had marked the opening of a new chapter. This was, perhaps, the most signal of Gwynne's victories, for the maternal tenderness for man means maternal dominance, a cool sense of superiority. Isabel was so conscious of Gwynne's mastery that she longed to kick him as she blushed to recall she had done once before. She rubbed her arms instinctively, as if she still felt the furious pressure of his fingers, and when the memory of another sort of pressure abruptly presented itself she hurredly bathed her eyes and went out on her horse.



VII

FOR a week she was so moody and irascible that Abraham twice gave warning, Old Mac artfully took to his bed with rheumatism, and only the inexcitable Chuma was unconcerned. She rode her horse nearly to death, snubbed Anabel—whose children were down with the measles—over the telephone, and even boxed the ears of a dilatory hen. At the end of the week a sudden appreciation of her likeness to a cross old maid frightened her, and time and the weather completed the cure. Her ill-humor, which had scourged through every avenue of her being, took itself off so completely that it seemed to announce it had had enough of her and would return no more.

And the spring came with a rush. The hills burst into buttercups, "blue eyes," yellow and purple lupins, the heavy pungent gold-red poppy. The young green of weeping willows and pepper-trees looked indescribably delicate against the hard blue sky. Rosewater was a great park, all her little squares and gardens, and long rambling streets, set thick with camellias, roses, orange-trees heavy with fruit, immense acacia-trees loaded with fragrant yellow powdery blossoms. Main Street was clean again, and so were the farmers and their teams at the hitching-rails; the girls were beginning to wear white at church on Sunday, and to walk about without their hats. The great



valley was as green as the hills, save where the earth had been turned, and one or two almond orchards were so pink they could be seen a mile away. It was spring in all its glory, without a taint of summer's heat, or a lingering chill of winter.

In Isabel's garden were many old Castilian rose bushes, that for fifty years had covered themselves pink with the uninterrupted lustiness of youth; and their penetrating, yet chaste and elusive fragrance, combined with the rich heavy perfume of the acacia-tree beside the house, would have inspired a distiller and blender of scents. The birds sang as if possessed of a new message; and several of Isabel's prize roosters, tired of their old harems, flew over the wire-fences and strutted off in search of adventure, proclaiming their route by loud and boastful clamor. When they were captured by the unsympathetic Abe and restored to their excited ladies, they flew at and smacked them soundly, then tossed back their red combs and crowed with all their might: a pæan to the ever conquering male.

There were other flowers besides Castilian roses in Isabel's garden, haphazardly set out and cared for, but the more riotous and luxuriant for that. And all around her, save on the Leghorns' hills, was the gay delicate tapestry of the wild flowers. The marsh glittered like bronze in the sunlight. In the late afternoon it was as violet as the hills. In the evening afterglows it swam in as many colors as the Roman Campagna. At this hour the sky was often as pink as the almond orchards, melting above into a blue light but intense; while everything in its glow, the tall trees on the distant mountains, and the picturesque irregularities of the marsh-lands, seemed to lift up their



heads and drink in the beauty until Isabel expected to see them reel.

And the pagan intoxication of spring took as complete a possession of her. She sat under the long drooping yellow sprays of her acacia-tree, her lap full of the pink Castilian roses, and dreamed. No one could help being in love in the spring, she concluded, given a concrete inspiration; and far be it from any creature so close to nature as herself to attempt to stem that insidious musical scented tide. It was possible that Gwynne would not return, or returning, would flout her; she hardly cared. In fact so steeped was she in the pleasures of merely loving, in a sweet if somewhat halcyon passion, that she had no wish that the mood should be dispelled; and felt that she could ask nothing more than to spend the rest of her mortal life with a beautiful memory—like the aunt whose dust lay over the mountain in the convent yard. She knew that if Gwynne returned and demanded her, she should be tempted to marry him—she never went so far as to promise either him or herself the rounded chapter; but one of the strongest instincts of her nature was to squeeze the passing moment dry, jealously drink every drop of its juice. She had no intention of tormenting herself with problematical futures. Futures took care of themselves, anyhow.

She was subconciously aware that she could conceive and portray a more extreme phase of emotion than this present evolution, but she deliberately avoided the phantasm. She was utterly, ideally, absurdly happy. Not for a moment did she desire the raw material, the concrete substance, to which all dreams owe their being. The wild pagan gladness of the wood-nymph, rejoicing in her freedom from the worries of common mortals, and in the

vision of an undefined but absolute happiness, was enough for her. Sometimes, when walking in the early morning, far into the hills, and away from human eyes, she let the light electric breezes intoxicate her, and danced as she walked, or sang; nor, indeed, was she above whistling. She often spent the evening hours on the marsh, those long twilights that are so like England's; remaining, sometimes, as late into the night as the tide would permit, enjoying the contrast of the lonely desolate menacing landscape with the utter beauty of the day. She avoided San Francisco and Rosewater, but the extraordinary effervescence within her demanded an outlet of a sort, and she was so radiant to her small staff that they looked upon her with awe. She had actually a fortnight of bliss, and hoped that nothing might happen to disturb it for ever and ever. But no one's world has ever yet stood still.

One day Tom Colton's hoarse voice over the telephone begged her to "come at once." She was on her horse in ten minutes, in Rosewater in half an hour. There were groups of people in the street near the younger Coltons' house, the front door was open, several members of the family were passing in and out. As she entered the garden she saw one of them tie a knot of white ribbon to the bell knob.

Her first impulse was to run. She felt that rather would she hear of Gwynne's death than face Anabel in her maternal agony. But she set her teeth and went on, far more frightened than sympathetic. The people that overflowed the hall and parlor were all crying, but nodded to her, and Tom Colton, haggard and white, appeared at the head of the stair and beckoned. He pointed to the door of his wife's bedroom, as she ascended, and she went

forward hastily and entered without knocking. Anabel was standing on the threshold of the door that led into the nursery. Her face was white and wild, but she had not been crying.

"Isabel!" she exclaimed, in loud astonished voice, "my baby is dead! My baby is dead!"

Then Isabel, greatly to her own surprise, dropped into a chair and burst into vehement tears. For the moment the child was hers, she suffered pangs of maternal bereavement that seemed to tear her breast and twist her heart. But there was a terrible silence in those two rooms, and in a few moments it chilled and calmed her. She looked up to see Anabel staring at her with blank expanded eyes.

"What are you crying for? You?" demanded the young mother. "I never saw you cry before. And it's not your baby."

"I know it," said Isabel, humbly. "I suppose it is because I am so sorry for you. I am—terribly."

"I never thought you had that much feeling," said Anabel, dully. "You were always the strong one. Come and see my baby."

Isabel rose, trembling and unnerved, but no longer shrinking, and followed Anabel into the nursery, where the child, looking like a little wax-work, lay in its crib.

"She is dead!" said Anabel, in the same astonished indignant voice. "My baby!" She caught Isabel's arm and shook it violently. "It isn't true," she commanded. "Say it is not. How can it be? She spoke and laughed only two hours ago. The relapse was nothing. The doctor said so. That is not my baby." And then her

brain stopped for a moment, and Isabel carried her into the other room.

She remained with her until after the funeral. Anabel, when she recovered her senses, cried hopelessly for hours, but gradually controlled herself and rose and went about her affairs with a stern calm. It was her first trouble, but not for nothing had she been given a square jaw and a sturdy little figure. She was filled with dumb protest, and laid away her bright careless youth in the child's coffin, but she accepted the inevitable.

Mr. and Mrs. Leslie were in the south when the baby died, but arrived for the funeral. Until then Anabel clung to her friend, and so did young Colton, who was far more demoralized than his wife. He did not brush his hair, nor go to bed, but wandered about the house like a bewildered spirit, occasionally smiting his hands together, or embracing the other two children convulsively. He had no support to offer his wife, and Isabel was glad to stay with the brave stricken little creature; but when Mrs. Leslie arrived she felt herself superfluous and returned home.

She had had little time to think of Gwynne, but it had crossed her mind that she would accept this heartrending episode, in which she had been called upon to play an intimate part, as but another warning; one, moreover, that would stand its ground did she attempt to force it aside. But Gwynne entered and filled her dispossessed mind the moment she sat down under her acacia-tree, which was perhaps an hour after her return home. But this time her dreams did not flow upon a smooth golden scented tide. She searched the accumulated newspapers for mention of him in the despatches, wept stormily at his neglect,

tormented herself with the belief that Julia Kaye was in Washington; at all events that he had discovered that his love for herself was but one more passing fancy, born of propinquity.

She saw mention of him. Twice he had dined at the White House, and his name was frequently in the list of guests at other dinners and functions. He was not visiting at the British Embassy, and Isabel drew her only comfort from the fact: he might be enjoying himself too much to think of her, but his purpose was unaltered, or he certainly would be the guest of a man whom she knew to be his friend: Gwynne was the last man to embarrass anybody, and if the ambassador had enemies they would find his connivance at the Americanization of a useful British peer vastly to his own discredit.

Isabel enjoyed no further peace of mind. The flames of uncertainty devoured her. The worst she could endure, but suspense spurred her always ardent imagination to such appalling feats that she barely ate or slept. But she was far too high-handed to suffer actively for long. She buried her pride in one of her many crypts, summoned her feminine craft, and wrote Gwynne a letter. It began in the brief and business-like manner the iniquities of their builders demanded—they were on strike—and her facile pen flowed on with various other items of information, more or less unpleasant. Mr. Clink, the lessee of Mountain House, had absconded with all the furniture, including the doors and windows, and she hesitated to refurnish, not knowing if Gwynne would return in time for the salmon-fishing. Nor had she been able to find another tenant, although she had spent two days in the mountains. She thought it might be a good place for a sanitarium, if he

were inclined to form a company. Some sulphur springs had recently bubbled out of the ground near the house, which would add to the value of the property; but she must confess that they ruined the place for her. She distrusted the sudden advent of mineral waters; one never knew what was coming next. Then, after more cheering, but equally practical information, she rambled off into gossip, told the sad story of the Coltons' bereavement, and asked him a few friendly questions about himself. Of course he had not succeeded in getting his passport or he would be home—unless, to be sure, the Britisher was too strong in him after all, and he would not return. This alternative she contemplated with a lively regret, for she had had no one to talk to since he left, and so much business sat heavily on her shoulders. Then she announced herself his affectionate cousin; and it was not until the letter was gone, and quite a day of self-gratulation at her own adroitness, that it suddenly occurred to her that Gwynne had made up his mind that the first letter should come from her. For a few moments she was furious, then concluded that she did not care; she wanted to hear from him on any terms. She counted the days, intending finally to count the hours and minutes; but this agreeably breathless task came to an abrupt end at the close of the sixth day. Gwynne answered by telegraph. He thanked her for her interesting and more than welcome letter. He was well, and bored, and hoping daily to settle his affairs and start for home. In any case he should have returned to California: he was surprised at her doubts. She was not to bother further about his affairs out there. He had telegraphed to the contractor that he could wait as long as the strikers. He added that he longed for California.



Isabel wondered if he had not dared to trust himself in a letter, finally concluded that this was the secret of the long telegram, dismissed her apprehensions, and, with a soothed but by no means tranquil imagination, yielded herself up again to dreams and the spring.



VIII

IT was close upon the middle of April when Gwynne left the train a mile from Lumalitas, and, being unheralded, walked across the fields to his house. He had intended to get off at Rosewater, hire the fastest horse in town, and ride out to Old Inn; but he had been seized with doubt and diffidence, and while he was still turning hot and cold the train moved out of the station. It was now nearly ten weeks since he had seen Isabel, and during that time he had received one letter from her. This letter he had read and reread until its contents were meaningless; and he was still in doubt as to what might lurk between the lines. He was reasonably sure that he had forced her to write, but whether mere pique and curiosity had been his aides, he was far from being able to determine. She had been right in assuming that he dared not trust himself to the tempting privacy of the letter. He had no idea how he stood, and would not run the risk of making a fool of himself; not until he was face to face with her could he pretend to decide upon any course of action. But he had been tormented for ten weeks as he had never expected to be tormented by any woman. Although he still assured himself that he intended to marry her, the riot in his mind and blood bred distrust of himself and evoked terrible images of Isabel at the altar with another. He should hate to the day of his death the beautiful old town of Santa

Barbara, where he had been without any sort of refuge from his thoughts; and in Washington, although he had managed to occupy his mind and time profitably, there were still hours which he must spend alone, and he had dreaded them.

And he was beset by other doubts than those of the mere lover. He was conscious that in these weeks of absence and longing, he had idealized Isabel, until the being he dwelt with in fancy was more goddess than woman. He knew many sides of her, but much had eluded him, even after he began to study her. That she was gifted in large measure with what the Americans so aptly termed cussedness he had good reason to know; and whether this very definite characteristic so far controlled her nature as to hold her nobler qualities in durance——— or were there nobler qualities? She had brain and common-sense; both attributes had compelled his respect long since. And she had character and pride—loyalty and independence. He had had glimpses of what he would unhesitatingly have accepted as heart and passion had he not known himself to be dazzled by her beauty and wilful powers of fascination. That she was wholly feminine, at least, he was convinced; she was too often absurdly so to keep up, with any one that saw her constantly, the fiction of the sexless philosopher. The very devil in her was of the unmistakable feminine kidney. All this gave him hope, and he knew, that when caprice permitted, she would be unrivalled as a companion. Intellectually, at least, there was no thought of his she could not share and appreciate; and her sense of humor and her feminine perversities would always delight him. If only there were depths beneath. The longings of the spirit are always formless, vaguely

worded, a little shamefaced. Gwynne hardly knew what was the great extreme he wanted in his wife, but he knew that if he did not find it he should be miserable. He was by no means the young man that had fallen blindly in love with Julia Kaye. He had had little time for introspection, for intimate knowledge of himself, in those days.

The spring was invented to remind men what mere mortals they are. Gwynne would have felt restless and disinclined for law and politics this morning had he never seen Isabel Otis. Every lark in the great valley was singing madly. Blue birds, yellow birds, sat on the fences and carolled at each other as if the world were always May. The very earth seemed to have sprouted into color. He had never imagined wild flowers by the billion, nor such a harmonious variety of color. The fields were green, the cherries, black and red and white, glistening and luscious, were ready for picking in his orchards. As he approached his house, he saw that all the white oaks, bare in winter, were in leaf; large soft young green leaves, that almost hid the pendent sad green moss. The air was warm and light, the sky so blue it seemed to laugh with a promise of eternal good things. The whole land breathed hope, and youth, and allurement to every delight, of which she alone possessed the store. He was soon to learn what a liar she was, but although it was many a long day before he took note of any phase of nature again, save her weather, he had an elusive presentiment that he should never cease to be grateful for that moment of quick unreasoning exultation in his youth and manhood, and in the mere joy of life.

He was not surprised, as he turned the corner of the veranda, to find Imura Kisaburo Hinamoto sitting with his feet on the railing, a cigarette in his mouth, and a

volume, issued by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, on his knee. But as the servant saw the master he rose promptly to his feet, extinguished the cigarette with his fingers, and stood in an attitude of extreme respect. He even smiled, but not propitiatingly; it was almost patent that the return of his chance superior was welcome.

Gwynne nodded. "Glad to see that you still improve your mind," he observed. "Tell Carlos to hitch up and go for my luggage: I left it at the station." He looked at his watch. It was half-past eleven. He hesitated a moment, then decided to postpone his visit to Isabel again. He did not feel in the mood to sit down and eat with her. "My horse at two o'clock," he added. And the Jap disappeared.

Gwynne went into the kitchen, and Mariana, who was peeling onions for an *olia podrida*, screamed and embraced him.

"No could help," she said, philosophically. "Very glad, señor, very glad."

Gwynne was not in the humor to repulse anybody, and assured her that she really made him feel that he had returned to his home. Several of her tribe were in the kitchen and looked expectant. He informed them that he had a box of New York sweets in his trunk, and retreated.

On the veranda he sat down facing his mountain, which like the rest of the world was a mass of delicate color, where it was not merely green, and seemed to move gently under the pink shimmering haze. Beyond was the blue crouching mass of the old volcano. "The eternal hills" was a phrase that never occurred to him when he watched these mountains, always veiled under a colored and moving haze. They looked far more likely to pull up their feet

and walk off. But Gwynne, although the border beneath his veranda was full of sweet scents, and the roses on the pillars hung about him, and the air was a soft caressing tide, was no longer concerned with nature. He was nervous and full of doubt, of uneasy anticipation that he would not appear to advantage at three o'clock that afternoon. He knew that if he were really panic-stricken and attempted to carry it off in the masterful manner, she would laugh in his face. If he could work himself up to the attitude, well and good. At the same time he was vaguely conscious that this period of alternate hope and fear, of cold fits and hot, would one day be sweet in the retrospect, and regretted with some sadness; an episode in the lover's progress gone beyond recall.

There was a sound of wheels on the county road, then on his own property. He wondered at the unusual dispatch of his Carlos, but realized in a moment that a buggy was approaching, not a wagon. Then there was a light slouching step on the veranda, and he rose to greet Tom Colton.

"By Jove, old chap, I'm glad to see you," he began, and thankful that he had written his condolences; but he paused abruptly. Colton ignored the outstretched hand.

"So you've got your passport?" he said. And his ingenuous blue eyes were full of a hard antagonism.

"Yes," said Gwynne. "I should have told you in a day or two. How did you find out?" he added, curiously. "I took my oath before the passport clerk in the innermost recess of the State Department."

"There's not much I don't find out. Only, I got wind of this a little too late. So did some others, or you might have hung round Washington for the next four years.

Do you call it square not to have told me of this before you left?"

"I saw no obligation to take you into my confidence. In the first place the result of my pilgrimage was very doubtful, and in the second you would have done all you could to balk me. When have I given you reason to write me down an ass?"

"You are too damned clever," muttered Colton. "Too clever by half. Much better for you if you had stayed where you were. You had no enemies when you left, but now, let me tell you, you've got a bunch that it will take more than your cleverness to handle."

"They can do their worst. I thought that all I needed was hard work, but I fancy that what I missed most was the stimulus of enemies."

"Well, you've got it all right."

Somewhat to the host's surprise he suddenly seated himself and tipped back his chair. Gwynne remained standing, leaning against a pillar, his hands in his pockets. Colton surveyed him frankly. His eyes were still hard and he was very angry, but he saw no reason why he should be uncomfortable, and although he could disguise his feelings when he chose, he knew that here it was safe to allow himself the luxury of frankness. He was the more annoyed, as what friendship he was capable of he had given to Gwynne. That would not have stayed hand or foot a moment, were his path in the least obstructed, but he regretted that they had come to an issue so early in the game. Indeed, he had hoped to manipulate Gwynne's destinies so subtly that they would be politically bound for life, with himself always a length ahead. It was true that once or twice he had felt a misgiving that the Englishman, with

all his aristocratic disdain for devious ways, might match him and win, but the shock of this early outwitting had been none the less severe.

"Did you have a hard time getting it?" he demanded.

"Rather. Never heard so much palaver in my life."

"Well, I wish there had been more. I think I have at least the right to ask what you intend to do next."

"Return to Judge Leslie's office to-morrow—for the matter of that, I have read a good deal since I left. In September I shall have been a year in the State, and of course I can vote. I am not so sure that I shall."

"Yes! That is all, I suppose?"

"For the present. You are too good a politician to fancy that American citizenship has invested me with a halo. Except to a hundred odd farmers, Rosewater, a small group in San Francisco, and a party boss or two, I am unknown. No doubt I shall be several years achieving sufficient prominence either to run for office, or to accomplish anything whatever—outside of Rosewater. So far as I can see, this immediate citizenship has effected two results only: I am now in a position to take advantage of any political change that may develop, instead of sowing for another to reap—and—"

He hesitated, and Colton shot him a keen glance. "It has made a change in you, I guess. I noticed that the minute I laid eyes on you. If anything was needed to make me madder, it was that."

"Yes—I am changed. That is to say, I am poised. In spite of the determination to absorb Americanism with every pore, there was always the lurking doubt that it wouldn't do; that some day I should make a bolt for England. Now the matter is settled forever. I not only am

an American but always have been. The highest legal opinion in the country was called in, and that was what finally decided the question. I accepted it as literally as the others did, and in so doing I relegated my English life to the episodical backwaters: among my adventures in India and Africa. I fancy that if England came to a death struggle in my time, and every man counted, I should fight for her. I certainly never should fight against her. But it is a profound relief to me that I am not throwing her over, that we have no legitimate right to each other. I fancy that that, too, demoralized me a bit."

"How did you feel when you took that oath?" asked Colton, more and more curious, almost forgetting his grievance. "It's a kind of solemn oath. I've had a sort of chill when I've heard it taken once or twice."

"There could hardly be a more solemn oath. I don't know that it gave me a chill, but I certainly read it over several times before I took it. And I took it without any reservations."

"Did you feel an American the moment you took it?"

"Yes—I did. That is to say I felt a certain buoyancy. The die was cast. There could be no more hesitation and doubt. My new life had actually begun."

"It's begun, all right. Jiminy, but you'll have a tough time. They're onto you now. You haven't the ghost of a chance to make a move they won't see before your hand is off the board."

Gwynne replied with even more than his usual fluency.

"Yes," replied Colton, with a sigh. "I guess that's where we'll all bring up. But meanwhile? Are you going to throw me over?"

"It will depend upon yourself. I have no objection to

confide to you such plans as I have been able to formulate. Judge Leslie advised me to play about in society, in Washington, but I was in no humor for anything of the sort. I had uncommon opportunities to study men and conditions, and I took full advantage of them. I doubt if I shall vote until the next Presidential election. Then, if an independent party of consequence has not been formed, and I see no prospect of working up one in this State, I shall vote the Democratic ticket. As things stand at present, it is the less of two evils, and would at least accomplish a reduction of the tariff, and something towards a redistribution of wealth. I haven't the least doubt that the Democrats, if they get in—unless they have a really good man up their sleeve—will abuse their power quite as much as the Republicans have done; but that will take some time; and meanwhile a new party is sure to grow up, for the best men in the country are thoroughly roused. There's no doubt on that point—and it is a point you would do well to remember. There have been chapters before in the world's history when right has paid."

"For a while," said Colton, dubiously. "The point is now that you are likely to join the Democrats."

"To vote with them. Theirs are the soundest principles. I stick to that point."

"I don't question it. I only wish elections weren't two years off; I'd like to get to work." He took a bag of peanuts from his pocket and began to munch thoughtfully. "But you are turning me off. What do you mean exactly?"

"I shall have nothing to do with the machine. I shall speak and make propaganda, that is all. My object is not so much to get the Democrats in as the Republicans out. I shall do nothing to split the Democratic party—and play

a losing game—unless a really great movement should rise, gather strength, and sweep the country. It is on the cards that there will be such a movement, and I throw myself into it the moment I am persuaded the split will not work to the advantage of the Republicans."

"How much enthusiasm have you pumped up?"

"Enthusiasm!" Gwynne's eyes roved over his "fair domain." Isabel, at least, was not far from its borders! "I cannot say that I am at boiling-point, but I don't fancy that matters much. I have my work cut out and I shall do it. Perhaps I shall work more disinterestedly without enthusiasm. Certainly I shall be more clear-sighted. If ever there was a time in the history of a country to sink individual ambition, it is now."

"Gwynne!" said Colton, abruptly. "What in thunder does it all amount to, anyhow? What difference does it make—will it make a thousand years hence—that you and I are sitting here on the very edge of creation, solemnly discussing the rottenest subject of our little time—American politics? What's the use of the socialists frothing, and nations trying to overturn one another? I had rather die on the spot than that the United States should be conquered for five minutes by Japan or any other Asiatic power, although I could endure the victory of a people that I recognized as our equals. Why are instincts planted so strongly? There may be a reason for a few years; but that's just it, a few mean little years and it is all over. What difference does anything really make, so long as we are comfortable? Everything else, every other instinct, is artificial. My wife is a religious little body and believes in reward and punishment hereafter, that we must spend at least a certain part of our time in this life preparing for

the next. I'd like to believe the same, not only to please her, but because I could look forward to meeting my child again; but, somehow, I can't. The present has always been about as much as I could tackle. And I fancy that when I'm through with it, I won't want any more. But although the present whirls so fast that I don't have time for the sort of thinking intellectual people like you and Isabel do, still it does sometimes dash across my mind —that question: 'What is it all for? And why do we sweat through life for what amounts to exactly nothing in the end?'"

"You cannot be sure it amounts to nothing. Sometimes I have the fancy that the entire round globe has just one inhabitant, of which we merely appear to be individual manifestations: that we are, in fact, a part of the earth herself, and she absorbs and casts us forth again, as she rushes along to her own destiny as sentient as ourselves. All the planets are alive in the same way, and they are all racing to see which will make the greatest showing on what we call down here the Judgment Day—that is to say, which shall have produced the most balanced and perfected being; which shall have whirled away the most original sin and sifted out a man, great and good without self-righteousness—to my mind the worst of mortal failings because its correlative, injustice, is the source of most of the unhappiness. That will be the millennium, and having no windmills and evils left to fight, we minute visibilities will welcome deindividualization. Then, no doubt, there will be a grand final battle between the great body of good thus formed, and the evil cast out, but roaming space and joining forces. If we do our best here we shall win, and be happy ever after. There is no question, that if



you follow your higher instincts you are happier in the long run than if you fall a slave to your base and mean; and that, to my mind, is the proof that the highest instincts are meant to be followed to some greater end."

"Hm. I have heard a good many theories, first and last, and that sounds as plausible as any."

"All this is very casually related to American politics, except that we had better clean up when the opportunity is vouchsafed us; for nothing degrades human nature nor retards civilization so much as politics gone altogether wrong. As far as you are concerned, although it was understood that the compact was to end with my citizenship, I have no thought of ending it unless the conditions I hope for shall crystallize meanwhile. If it seems best to keep the Democratic party unsplit I shall do your canvassing and speaking, for it will make me known, and give me the opportunity to inculcate the principles I purpose to advocate. If you ignore them when you are in office, so much the worse for you, and better for me; for, as I have told you more than once, the moment I am in power I shall devote my energies to pulling you and your like down and out. But I should advise you to join the third party if it arises."

"No doubt I might, if it were strong enough," said Colton, frankly. "I don't propose to play any losing game, and if the Democratic party goes by the board, T. R. Colton doesn't follow. And if a third party came in to stay it would have to have a boss—"

"Not your sort."

"Oh, well, time enough." Colton's ill-humor was now somnolent under some two pounds of peanuts. He rose and shook hands with Gwynne. "Glad to see you looking

so well—you're some heavier than when you came to California, by-the-way, and it suits you first rate. Be sure you call on my wife the first time you come to town."

He declined Gwynne's invitation to dinner, and drove off, looking slothful and amiable once more. But what went on behind that mask, within that long ill-built cranium, Gwynne had never pretended to guess. Nor, to-day, did he care.

At three o'clock he gave his horse to Abe, was told that the lady of the manor was out walking, and went into the house. He had a fancy to meet her again in the room that harbored the sweetest of his California memories. It was dark and cool. Only one window, looking upon the garden, was open. Beside it was a comfortable chair which he took possession of and looked out into the wild old garden so different from the excessively cultivated plots of Rosewater and his own meagre strips. There was no veranda on this side of the house, and the great acacia-tree, with its weight of fragrant gold, was but a few feet from the window. The entire garden was enclosed by a hedge of the Castilian roses of which he had heard so much, rare as they now were in California. The dull green leaves and tight little buds could hardly be seen for the mass of wide fluted roses of a deep old-fashioned pink. And there were large irregular borders covered with the luxuriant green and the blue stars of the periwinkle, beds of marguerites and violets, bushes of lilac and honeysuckles, roses and jasmine. The blended perfumes were overpowering, however delicious; Gwynne had sat up half the night before talking to his mother after a long hot journey; he fell asleep.



ANCESTORS

Perhaps it was his late conversation, perhaps something more subtle, but he felt himself transported to a void. In a moment he realized that the void was not space as he knew it, but rigid invisible substance. He slipped along through rocky strata, hearing strange echoes and inhaling the disagreeable odors of healing waters. Suddenly he found himself in a vast hollowed space, empty but for many pillars. His vision grew keener. In the very centre of the hall he saw two pillars of a colossal size, and standing between them a being almost as large. This unthinkable giant had an arm about each pillar and strained as Samson had strained at the pillars of the temple. Then a new and powerful force drew him upward once more, and he awoke.

He turned his head towards the dim interior of the room and for a dazed moment thought that he beheld Spring herself. She wore white and had dropped a mass of wild flowers at her feet; she looked as if rising out of them. Her hat was covered with poppies and wild azalea, and she had a sheaf of buttercups and "blue eyes" in her belt.

"I haven't changed my ideas one bit," she said, with a shrug, as Gwynne rose and came towards her. "But I can't help it!"

IX

ISABEL rose as usual at five, but, instead of dressing at once, stood at her window idly and looked out over the marsh. Thirteen hours before she had made a decision on the instant, or so it seemed to her, and in that instant changed her life so completely that she was still a little dizzy, and the future as yet had taken on no coherent form. She had even told Gwynne she was positive she could *stand* him for ever, and this, with her varied if incomplete knowledge of his sex, she took to be even more significant and hopeful than the uncompromising sense of loving him. No doubt there would be many interesting battles before two such developed personalities became more or less one, but at least he had none of the petty and selfish and altogether detestable qualities of her father, her uncle, and Lyster Stone; and he was entirely human. And he was young and she was young. It all seemed very wonderful; wonderful to be so happy, and yet to feel that she had relinquished nothing, or at least not the tenth of what she would have lost if she had married Prestage—or any other man. If she had not met Gwynne she knew that she never should have married at all, and, not having had the best within her ken, been happy enough.

And yet she was a little sad, and it was by no means the gentle melancholy of reaction. She had reason, and felt a disposition to box her own ears. She knew that Gwynne,

triumphant and happy as he was, had ridden away vaguely dissatisfied. He had turned and given her a keen questioning glance as he mounted, and had not turned again. She had laughed, and waved her hand, and felt a new desire to tantalize him.

She had abandoned herself to sheer happiness the day before, to the mere pagan delight in an ardent lover come in her own ardent youth, to the sense of an unbroken circle of companionship, and to so wild a triumph in having brought Gwynne to her feet, made him quite mad about her, that she had fairly danced about the room, and tormented him as far as she dared.

This was Wednesday. They were to be married on Saturday, that Lady Victoria, who was leaving for England in the evening, might nod them a blessing. Then, no doubt, Gwynne would have his way in most things, and she already felt the stirrings of mere female ductility. But meanwhile she should exercise and enjoy her own power to the full. And she had good reason to believe that no woman had ever been more charming, distracting, provocative. If Gwynne had been in love when he came, he had kissed her very feet when he left, and had been as bewitched as any one so clear-brained could be. Moreover, she had promised him everything he wished, agreed without demur to the hasty marriage, and even, when he asked her whether she would prefer to live in her house or his, had sweetly left it to him to decide. They were to spend the honeymoon in the house on Russian Hill. She was incapable of looking beyond that. There had been at least twenty bewildering hints that when his time came one rein, at least, should be his—in all matters of great moment, two—and although no doubt she would break away

very often, what more delightful than to recapture and subdue? What more could a man want than the most fascinating woman in the world, whom only his own passion could shock from mere existence into the fulness of life? But Gwynne, in the depths of his swimming brain, had wanted something more, and Isabel knew that if he had slept as ill as herself, the doubt had more than once assailed him if she were anything more than a charming beautiful and clever creature, but perverse and egotistical; who would keep him distractedly in love with her, but leave the best part of him unsatisfied.

Her perversity had gone with him, and during a more or less wakeful night she had repented, and even wept at the thought that something might occur to exterminate him before ten o'clock on the following morning—when they were to meet again—and he would depart unconsoled by the knowledge that it was the greater needs in his own nature that had called to hers. At least she hoped this was so, and, in an excess of humility, wondered if she really had enough to give—the power to insure their complete happiness. She had lived in a sort of fool's paradise, and no doubt imagined herself a far more rounded being than she was. Well, she could grow, and finally she had curled down into her pillow and fallen asleep.

This morning she was rather tired, and although still repentant, suspicious that when he returned her femininity would fly up with her spirits, and she would be more than content to fascinate and bewilder him. Like all women in love and fumbling blindly through the outer mysteries, she was eagerly psychological, discovering once for all her sex and herself.

Her eyes had been fixed dreamily upon Tamalpais, but

suddenly they were drawn irresistibly upward by the pricking consciousness of something strange. It was a moment before she realized that she had never seen a sky just like that before. Her back was to the east, and although the sun was rising it was still low; at this stage of the dawn the sky was generally gray. This morning it was a ghastly electric blue. And then, while her eyes were still staring, and something in her brain moving towards expression, she heard a noise that sounded like the roar of artillery charging across the world. She fancied it rushing through the Golden Gate and up the bays and marsh, before it hurled itself with a vicious and personal violence against the wall beneath her window. She braced herself against the sash as the house shook in the strongest earthquake she had ever felt. It appeared to be brief, however, and she was turning away to dress herself, when it commenced again with a fury and violence of which she had never dreamed the modern earth to be capable. She threw herself on her knees the better to grip the window-ledge, but her only sensations were surprise and an intense expectation. Electric flames, as blue and ghastly as the reeling sky, were playing all over the marsh, she saw the long bare line of Tamalpais charge down and up like a colossal see-saw; and in that terrific plunging and dancing, that abrupt leaping from one point of the compass to the opposite, or towards all at once, that hysterical shaking and struggling as if two planets had rushed from their orbits and were fighting for life in midspace, Isabel expected the entire globe to stand on end, and was convinced that the finish of California, at least, had come. She had read of earthquakes that lasted for hours, and even days, and no doubt this one was merely getting up steam, for it increased in

violence and momentum every second. The house rattled like a big dice-box. She expected it to leap down the slope into the shivering marsh. Pieces of rock fell down the face of the cliff opposite, but so great was the roar of the earthquake, so close the sound of creaking and straining timbers, of falling chimneys, and china, and even plaster, that she could not hear the impact as they struck the ground and bounded high in air.

Then, there was a bulge of the earth upward, a twist that seemed to wrench the house from its foundations, and the earthquake ceased as suddenly as it had come. Isabel waited a few moments for it to return, incredulous that the mighty forces beneath could compose themselves so abruptly; then rose and began to dress herself.

Human blades of a fine temper meet a sudden and terrific onslaught of Nature in one of two spirits: utter cowardice, or an attitude of impersonal curiosity. It is not a matter of heroism but of nerves. The bravest may become abject, if their will has been weakened by some drain on the nervous system; others, that would run from a mouse or prove unequal to the long-heralded danger, rise, in the intense concentrated excitement and surprise of the moment, to a state of absolute and even cynical indifference. One of the unwritten laws that has descended from father to son in California is that an earthquake, no matter how severe, is a mere joke, and should incite prompt and facetious comment. Isabel being both heroic and hardy, paid the California tradition the tribute of a smile and a shrug, and regretted that she had not been in San Francisco; she "liked being in the midst of things." Sentiment, psychology, egoism, had literally been bounced out of her. She knew that Gwynne might easily have

been killed, but although she intended to find out in the least possible time, to feel merely human in the face of such a stupendous exhibition of what nature could do when she chose, was a descent of which she, at least, felt herself incapable.

She hurried on her riding-clothes, dropped her braid under her jacket, and ran down the stairs. Chuma, trim and spotless, was sweeping the hall, white with fallen plaster. He gave her his usual good-morning grin and went on with his work. She paused and regarded him curiously.

"What do you think of our earthquakes?" she demanded.

"Oh, very big shake," he said, cheerfully. "Very big shake."

Vaguely nettled she took her hat from the rack and went out by the back way. Mac had knocked on her door immediately after the earthquake, and was now with Abe in the colony on the hills. He came running down when he saw her, and it was patent that his rheumatism, for once, was forgotten. His old red face with its prominent bones set in thick sandy gray hair was more animated than Isabel had ever seen it.

"Glory be!" he exclaimed, as he reached her. "That was about the worst! I was just tellin' Abe that I felt the great earthquake of '68 in this very house, in that very room, by gum, although I was up and dressed, for it was eight o'clock, and I'd gone back for my pipe. So, I know what I'm talkin' about, Miss Isabel, when I say that this was about four times as bad—"

"Please saddle my horse."

"Yes, marm. Wisht I could have got out of bed. I'd like to have seen if the earth rose and fell in a long wave like the shake of '68." Land's sakes, but those chickens

did squawk." And although he saddled Kaiser rapidly, he never paused in his reminiscence of the last Northern California earthquake to pass into history. "But this one! By Jiminy! Well, I guess we take the cake in everything out here, earthquakes included."

Isabel patted the still shaking horse. "Get the launch ready," she said, as she mounted; and Mac nodded. It was characteristic that neither thought of the danger of sudden shoals, of the always possible tidal wave, or of some new and diabolical trick of nature. The nerves were still keyed too high for anything so shabby as prudence.

Kaiser, no doubt glad to put himself into motion, bounded forward as his mistress lifted the bridle, and although Isabel did give an occasional glance ahead, to make sure the earth was not yawning, she never drew rein, and the horse galloped with all his might towards Rosewater. As the marsh narrowed she saw that the town was still there, and that there were no fires. As she approached the great iron bridge that connected Rosewater with the continuation of the county road, a horseman entered at its other end and galloped across, regardless of the law or a graver danger still. The next moment Isabel and Gwynne had shaken hands casually, and were riding towards Old Inn.

His eyes were shining and almost black. "I saw the mountains rock!" he exclaimed. "Rock? Dance. Then I thought they would plunge down into the earth and disappear. And St. Peter is flat. All the business district, including the four hotels, are down, and everybody in them buried in the ruins. A man dashed up as I was mounting, and I told all the men on the place to go to the rescue. The news came just in time to prevent the murder of Imura by Carlos, for not admitting that we had had the greatest

earthquake in the history of the world. It was the first symptom of patriotic fire I ever saw in Imura, but he stoutly maintained that in the matter of earthquakes Japan could do as well as California."

"That is all very well, but I have read a lot about Japanese earthquakes, and never of such an *extraordinary* one as this. Has anything terrible happened in Rosewater?"

"I saw a few chimneys down, but no buildings except the old brick school-house. Mrs. Haight was sitting on the curb-stone in her night-gown, wailing like a banshee, but although all the rest of the town appeared to be in the streets, and similarly attired, they were quiet enough. As I passed the cemetery I gave it a hasty side glance, half-afraid of what I might see. All the monuments are down and pointing in every direction. What gyrations! Do you suppose they've had it in San Francisco?"

"Do I suppose—much you know about our earthquakes! San Francisco always gets the worst of it, or seems to, there is so much more to shake. Your mother is probably in hysterics, although up on the hills one is safe enough. It is the sandy valley and the made ground down by the ferries—up to Montgomery Street, in fact—that get the worst of it. I have ordered the launch."

"Good. I wish my mother had gone east from El Paso, as she had half a mind to do. But she wanted to see her doctor again. I am afraid she won't look at this as we do. I never was so interested in my life. Was sure we were going to smash, but that it was worth while in anything so stupendous. I suppose it is too early to telephone."

Isabel pointed to the wires. They were sagging, and two of the telegraph poles were down. "Doubtless the tracks are twisted, too. We are fortunate to have the launch."

X

MAC, swollen with the prideful experience which enabled him to compare two great earthquakes, and his accumulations of practical data bearing thereon, appeared ten years younger, and, as Gwynne and Isabel rode up, was lording it over his fellow-hirelings. He had forbidden Chuma to make a fire in the kitchen stove until the chimney, what was left of it, had been repaired, directed him to bring down-stairs the oil-stove Isabel had bought for the old rheumatic's comfort, and cook breakfast upon it. As even the stovepipe in the out-building, used for preparing the elaborate repasts of the Leghorn, was twisted, Abe had been ordered to drag the great stove into the open, build a screen about it, and "do the best he could, and be thankful he was alive." Poor Abe, who had not been extant in 1868, and had even missed the considerable earthquakes of the Nineties, was in a somewhat demoralized state, and wondering audibly what people supposed he cared about chickens, anyhow.

Isabel and Gwynne sat down in the dining-room and ate their breakfast—on fragments—calmly and methodically, talking constantly of the earthquake, it is true, but instinct with that curious casuistry that a certain safety lay in following the ordinary routine of life; perhaps—who knows?—so great is the egoism of the human spirit—that the unswerving march of man in his groove might restore the balance of nature.

After breakfast Isabel went up to her room and dressed hastily and mechanically in a short walking-suit, as mechanically expecting the same earthquake to return to the spot associated with it. Gwynne wore his khaki riding-clothes, but it was doubtful if any one would be critical in San Francisco that morning. Nothing, as it happened, could have suited his purpose better, and it was long before he took them off.

When the launch was under way Isabel told Gwynne of the blue flames that had danced over the marsh during the convulsion. "If electricity is not a cause of earthquakes, it certainly is let loose by them," she added. "I expected every moment that we would blow up and fly off into space."

"I saw something of the same sort on the hills, and expected to see St. Helena spout flames."

In a few moments they were sensible that the constant artificial vibration of the boat was the most grateful sensation they had ever known, and of the wish that they could leave it only for a train, to be transferred at the end of a long journey to another train, and still another. But these sentiments were not exchanged, and their conversation was purely extrinsic. Here and there along the shore an old shanty lay on its side, or had tumbled forward to its knees; but for the most part dilapidated chimneys and fallen poles were the only visible symbols of the tumult beneath the smiling beautiful earth. Never had Earth looked so green, so velvety, its flowers so gay and voluptuous. Even the sky, now its normal deep blue, had this same velvety quality, the very atmosphere seemed to breathe the same rich satisfaction. But no birds were singing, and there was nothing normal in the groups of

people, gathered wherever there were habitations: they wore bath-robes, blankets, overcoats, anything, apparently, they had found at hand, and had not re-entered their treacherous habitations. No trains were running, but the drawbridge that separated the marsh from San Pablo Bay opened as usual.

Gwynne steered the launch, and his conversation and Isabel's drifted to speculations as to what had happened in the city.

"Thank heaven I had the foundations of that old house replaced," she said, "or I am afraid your mother would have shot right down to the Hofers' doorstep. I am fairly at ease about The Otis, for in spite of the old drifting sand-lots that district is built on, its foundations go down to bed-rock, and thanks to the strikers there is nothing to fall off the steel frame. But I am rather worried about the islands. San Francisco Bay is supposed to have been a valley some two hundred years ago, and if it dropped once it might again. Those islands are only hill-tops."

The islands, however, looked as serene as the rest of nature, although most of the chimneys were fallen or twisted, and there were the same groups of people in the open, awaiting another throe. These, however, had had time to recover their balance and clothe themselves. The launch, which had a new engine, had been driven at top speed, and it was not yet seven o'clock, barely the beginning of day to these luxurious people, but a day that would doubtless be remembered as the longest of their lives. On the military islands, routine, apparently, had received no dislocation, and on the steep romantic slopes of Belvedere the villas might have sunken their talons

to the very vitals of the rock. The most precariously perched had paid no toll but the chimney.

As the launch bounded past the long eastern side of Angel Island, Gwynne contracted his eyelids. "Have you noticed that black cloud over the city?" he asked. "At first it did not strike me particularly—but—it looks as if there might be a big fire."

Isabel, who faced him, turned her head. "There are always fires in San Francisco after an earthquake," she said, indifferently. "And about seven a day at any time. There are none on the hills, so your mother is not having a second fright. Poor thing! I am afraid she is terribly upset. I wish she had gone."

She sat about, to observe the city more critically. Already its sky-line was changed, for every chimney, smoke-stack, and steeple, commonly visible, was shattered or down. The smoke cloud, which looked like a great ostrich plume bent at the tip, was as stationary as the hills, and had a confident permanent air that they would lack for some time. And fixed as it was it seemed to grow larger.

"Steer to the east of Alcatraz," said Isabel, suddenly; "and towards Yerba Buena. I should like to see where the fires are."

When the launch was well off the point of Telegraph Hill, they saw several large fires on the western side of East Street, the wide roadway that divided the city from the water-front and Ferry Building. Far down, in the South of Market Street district there appeared to be other large fires.

"Warehouses, probably," said Isabel. "What a sight!" She indicated the collapsed sheds about the moles, and the

twisted and toppling appearance of the tower on the Ferry Building, which stood on the edge of the made ground. It was an immense structure of great weight, and only an uncommon honesty—and vigilance—in building had saved it from destruction. Had the piles been hollow, or too short to reach bed-rock, it would either have sunken or tumbled.

And then they noticed that the bay was silent and deserted. It was a moment before they realized that of the several lines of ferry-boats none appeared to be running. "That means that the tracks are out of working order," said Isabel, grimly. "We may have had the best of it, bad as it was. Ah!" One of the Oakland ferry-boats pushed out of its San Francisco mole. It was black with people. Isabel stared with wonder. "It looks as if people were running away from the city. Or perhaps a good many that live across the bay came over on the same mission as ourselves, and have been turned back. That would mean that all East Street was on fire and they could not get into the city. Well, let us hurry. Even although the fires are so far off they may terrify your mother. I remember she told me once in England that she had never seen a fire. I have a queer sensation in my knees."

Gwynne laughed. "I should think you might be used to fires by this time. And you have a celebrated fire department. I fancy you are just feeling the reaction."

"I was not a bit frightened during the earthquake!" said Isabel, indignantly. "But there is nothing *phenomenal* in fire to brace one up—and those had a sinister determined look—and that boat-load of people! I only hope your mother has not run away—under the impression that San

Francisco alone was shaken. We wouldn't find her for a week."

"My mother's nerves are not what they were, but I am positive she will not run. She is certain to wait for us at the house."

A few moments later they ran the launch up to the landing at the foot of Russian Hill. There were a few tumbled shanties on the slope, but none of the well-built houses had been dislodged, and the great buildings on this water-front were in good condition. Mr. Clatt was not visible, but left his cottage at Isabel's call, and gave them something more than his usual surly greeting.

"Glad to see you are all right," he said. "Been expectin' you. Jest stepped in to git my pipe."

"Much damage done?" asked Gwynne.

"Considerable, but I guess the shake 'll take a back seat. City's on fire."

"There are always fires after earthquakes," said Isabel, angrily.

"City's on fire. Thirty broke out s'multaneous. Water main's bust. Chief of Fire Department killed in his bed, or as good as killed. There's plenty left to fight the fire but nothin' to fight it with. Guess the old town 'll go up in smoke this time."

"My knees feel rather weak, too," said Gwynne. He turned to the wharfinger, who was pulling leisurely at his pipe. "We—my mother and Miss Otis, at least, may need this launch to leave the city with," he said. "Can I rely on you? You shall have a hundred dollars if you let no one steal it; and if the fire should reach this side, you are welcome to a refuge on my ranch."

"I'll see daylight through any one that looks at it," said

Mr. Clatt. "This ain't no time to stand on ceremony. The army's called out already to help the police keep order —the lootin' was disgraceful for about an hour. Every rat tumbled out of his hole, and of course they went for the saloons. I'm well enough known along here to be let alone when I show my teeth. Your house is all right, miss."

This side of the hill was almost deserted; nearly every one seemed to be watching the fires from the crest; but occasionally Gwynne and Isabel passed a solitary person clinging to his possessions, or a small group; and invariably were greeted with the same remark: "City's on fire. Water mains were broken by the earthquake."

As they passed through the crowd on the hill-top, they received similar information, although many added confidently that "something would be done. The wind was sure to change to the west."

And so far, at least, the picture from the heights was by no means appalling. There were a number of fires in the south, and a wall of flame and smoke along the water-front near the Ferry Building. Had the earthquake spared the mains they would merely have been spectacular.

Gwynne and Isabel, as they made the slight descent to the Belmont House, saw two of their Japs sitting on the roof throwing down the bricks of the fallen chimneys. Then they turned the corner and found Lady Victoria, an opera-cloak thrown over her night-clothes, pacing up and down the veranda.

"Oh, my God!" she exclaimed. "I did not dare to wonder if you were dead or alive. Why did we ever come to this God-forsaken country?" She did not offer to embrace them, but her eyes were brilliant, and there was a color in her cheeks. And no one had ever heard her talk

so fast. "Was it as dreadful with you? Did you get out of the house? I was awake when I heard that awful roar. Somehow, I knew what it meant, and before the earthquake was well begun I was out here. I never ran so fast in my life, although I was flung against the walls. And I almost wished I had stayed in the house. Such a sight! That awful reeling city! Just imagine thousands of buildings plunging, and leaping, and dancing, and toppling. Towers bowing to you so solemnly that I almost disgraced myself and had hysterics. And steeples pitching off, or huddling down like corpses. And that awful loud deep steady roar and crash of a thousand walls and chimneys falling. And the dust that seemed to swallow the city. For a moment I thought it had gone, and expected the hills to follow. Then it rose and everybody on earth seemed to be in those streets—and in white. They looked like Isabel's Leghorns. Such pigmies from up here. Pigmies! That is what we all are. And Angélique, the wretch, has run away."

"Well, she cannot go far, as all the railroads but one seem to be injured," said Gwynne, soothingly. "Better go in and dress and we'll walk down and take a look at things. That will divert your mind."

But it was not until Isabel had assured her that the worst force of an earth movement in California spent itself in the first great shock, and offered to help her dress, that Victoria could be persuaded to enter the house. Gwynne fetched Isabel's field-glass and studied the scene below, picking out the more disastrous work of the earthquake. All the new solid buildings, and most of the old, appeared to be unharmed, and the residence district, built of wood on stone foundations, for the most part, was much as usual,

save for its altered sky-line: every chimney and skylight had disappeared. But tall slender factory chimneys had broken raggedly in half, and the great tower of the City Hall, standing high against the blue sky and advancing smoke, seemed to shriek like a man whose flesh had been torn off with hot pincers until only the shamed skeleton was left. Nothing but the steel cage that had supported the bricks remained: eloquent of the millions that a dishonest city government and its confederates had stolen.

Gwynne, as his eyes travelled more precisely, picked out more and more evidences of the power of the earthquake. Steeples were gone, walls fallen outward, roofs caved in, or yawning where a heavy chimney had gone through, old houses were on their knees, or had fallen into their cellars. Great cracks and rifts in walls and asphalt, fallen cornices and shattered windows detached themselves from the general picture of the half-ruined but oddly indifferent city. Almost immediately, through the smoke in the southeast, he had caught a glimpse of The Otis, an immense skeleton of steel, that had defied the earth, and offered nothing to the fire. But although he experienced a passing gratitude that he should lose nothing by the disaster, he forgot the incident in a moment: he felt wholly impersonal.

Everybody in the city, apparently, was out-of-doors. The squares were black with people, quiet crowds, it would seem, moving slowly where they moved at all. He saw mounted officers and parading soldiers, and groups of firemen standing impotently by their hose and engines. In the burning South of Market Street district rivers of people were pouring towards the great central highway, their arms and shoulders burdened; fleeing no doubt with

their household goods. Then Gwynne began to study the fires, and it dawned upon him that he was looking down not upon a mere conflagration but a burning city. It was more than likely that the fires would not cross Market Street, and that those near the water-front would be extinguished by water pumped from the bay; but "South of Market Street" was a city in itself, and not only did he feel a certain pity for all those terrified black pigmies down there, but a pang for the extinction of a region so identified with the early history of San Francisco. Rincon Hill was obliterated by the smoke, but no doubt she would go; with all her pretty old-fashioned houses, so unlike the horrors on the plateau below him—and South Park with its tragic memories. Moreover, if all the factories and warehouses, and the blocks devoted to the wholesale business, were destroyed, the city would be poorer by many millions.

He shifted his glass away from the fires. More and more details arrested his eye. Inert forms were being carried out of houses where chimneys or skylights had gone through the roof. Automobiles were flying about, hundreds of them. Mounted orderlies were dashing at breakneck speed between the Presidio and the city. For a moment he wondered, then remembered that General Funston lived on Nob Hill. He inferred that the Mechanics' Fair Building, down in the western section of the valley, had been turned into a hospital, for automobiles were constantly dashing up and delivering limp and helpless burdens. The old Mission Church, Dolores, was unharmed, but not far away, and in that crowded district built upon the filled-in lake, or lagoon, of the Spanish era, he saw that a large building, doubtless a cheap and flimsy

hotel, had sunken to its upper story, and that people were digging frantically about it. Every house in the immediate neighborhood had dropped into its cellar or lurched off its foundations. But it was all like some horrid picture by Doré: the smoky darkening atmosphere, the jets, the bouquets, the square masses of flame, each seeming to embrace a block if not more, the dark slowly rolling clouds not far overhead, the tides of humanity dwarfed by the distance, the broken dislocated houses, the great haughty defiant buildings, with the superb conflagration behind them.

One of the neighbors, who lived on the crest, returning from a reconnoitring expedition, paused and informed him that the mayor had been persuaded to call a meeting of the more prominent citizens, to decide, if possible, what might be done to save the city, and to keep the people from falling into a panic. Mr. Phelan, the "Reform Mayor"—of the city's last period of municipal decency—had suggested sending to the military islands for dynamite enough to blow up a wide zone beyond the fire; but property-owners were already protesting. Many felt sure the fire would not cross Market Street, others were as certain that the whole city would go. A corps of marines had been despatched from Mare Island immediately after the earthquake and would undoubtedly save the Ferry Building and the docks, but if the fire ran over from Market Street a few blocks higher up, nothing could save all that great business, shopping, and hotel district; to say nothing of Chinatown, and possibly these hills. All South of Market Street was in motion, making for the ferries or the bare western hills, the Presidio and Park; they must answer for many of the fires, as they had not given a thought



to cracked chimneys when they wanted their breakfast; but of course crossed wires and the overhead trolley system were responsible for as many more. Then he advised Gwynne to order that all the bath-tubs in the house should be filled with what water was left in the pipes, and that a stock of provisions from the neighboring grocer and butcher should be laid in. "Personally I don't believe the fire will ever come as far as this," he said. "But there'll be a famine, no doubt of that. The wires are all down, scarcely a train is running, the country may be as hard hit as ourselves—and all that crowd down there to feed!"

Gwynne thanked him and replied that the launch was in waiting; but when the man had gone he called the Japs, gave them money, and ordered them to follow his neighbor's suggestion. He realized that he had no desire to leave this city where life was suddenly keyed to its highest pitch, and retire to the security and inaction of the country. Moreover, he recalled the promise he had given Hofer and his other friends on the night of the ball: this might be the emergency, and what services he could render should be given freely enough.

Lady Victoria and Isabel came forth, and they all made their way rapidly down to Nob Hill. The stair was more rickety than ever, and many of the older houses they passed looked badly shaken within, if not without—every door was open. The floors were covered with plaster; more often than not the furniture and ornaments, and even mantels, were massed in an indistinguishable heap. The Hofers' door, like the rest, was open, and they saw that the spiral marble stair was a pile of glittering splinters and that the pictures had been turned completely round or flung across the hall. Mrs. Hofer had been too eager to

reign on Nob Hill to wait for a new foundation. Several of the servants were sitting on the steps, and informed Gwynne that all the family, including the children, had gone out in two automobiles an hour before, to see the city.

They walked down the hill, stopped many times by returning citizens anxious to impart information. The Italians on Telegraph Hill were mad with terror: "they were no Californians," in accents of bitter contempt. Portsmouth Square was full of Chinamen laughing at the women that had run there from the hotels without shoes on their feet, and only an opera or automobile cloak over their night-clothes. Even more amused were those Oriental philosophers at the white scared faces of the prisoners clinging to the bars of the jail. Nobody could tell how many people had been killed by falling roofs and walls, although the wildest stories were current, but so far there were more doctors and nurses attending to business than patients to care for. Down in the Mechanics' Fair Building, which had been converted into an emergency hospital, they were working as methodically, with book and pencil, as well as with bandage and instrument, as if earthquake and fire were a part of the daily routine. "Almost everybody was quiet, but there were sights down there, Oh, Lord, there were sights!" One man button-holed Gwynne, as he had button-holed others on his ascent, and informed him that he had "got down there" just in time to see two hundred and fifty thousand dollars go up in smoke. "Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and it has taken me twenty years to make it!" he reiterated, with an excited bitterness that was almost hilarious. He did not ask Gwynne if he had lost anything, but passed on

to button-hole the next man and pour out his tale of individual protest; upon him the earthquake and fire had made a personal attack.

"How strange it seems to be in the midst of so much *life*—mere physical life," said Lady Victoria. "A whole city tense and helpless! I wonder that man could think of himself. We are all mere fragments of one great whole."

Her eyes were still restless and bright, her mask had fallen, and with it, curiously, many of her years. For a time, at least, the heavy burden of self had slipped from her tired spirit.

Few stood in the doorways, or even gardens; nearly every one not exploring the city was in the middle of the street. In the boarding-house district, half-way down the hill, the corners were crowded with people watching the fires, although as many more had gone to the heights to command a better view. Some were still dazed and white with terror, a few looked distraught; more than one man was as nervous as his wife. But the majority were calm, although they wore an expression of being ready for anything. A few, mindful of the California tradition, were joking and relating the absurdities of their experience. There was no question that the shock had been far greater in the city than in and about Rosewater, and both Isabel and Gwynne, to Lady Victoria's disgust, expressed a regret that they "had missed anything." But it was possible that the convulsion had been even worse elsewhere. St. Peter was built over a known fault, and San Francisco was not; and indeed news was already coming into the city of coast hamlets that had literally been torn to pieces. Other wild rumors were flying about. New York had

disappeared. Chicago had been swept by a tidal wave. As the telegraph wires were all down no one attempted to account for these items of news, but so much had already happened that if the eastern hemisphere had dropped to the level of Atlantis, no one would have stared.

When they reached Union Square they found it so crowded that they hardly could make their way. Not only the guests of the St. Francis Hotel, that flanked it, had taken refuge in the open, but those of many other hotels. A few of the men were still in pyjamas, and of the women in dressing-gown or opera-cloak, caught up as they fled. But the majority had ventured back and dressed themselves, so that the "sights" were not what they may have been an hour earlier. But no one seemed to care for shelter; at all events they liked companionship in misery, although few besides the foreign members of the Grand Opera Company were voluble. Gwynne and Victoria and Isabel saw many of their acquaintance, not all recognizable at first, for even those that had returned to their rooms to dress themselves had taken little pains with their hair. One woman of great beauty, however, whose husband's hat surmounted her flowing locks, was just informing Isabel that she had reached that frame of mind where vanity was pressing apprehension to the wall, when there was an explosive sound, another as of rushing wings, the crowd stumbled against one another, and the large buildings about the square rocked. Again there was an exodus, and some clutching and gasping; but only a few of the refugees from the burning district, sitting on the furniture they had dragged with them, screamed. It was over in a few seconds, and then Gwynne pressed his women gently out of the crowd and down, through the tide of refugees, to

Market Street. They walked in the middle of the street, for the sidewalks in this business district, where many of the buildings were of brick or stone, were littered with the débris of fallen cornice and shattered windows and chimneys. Market Street was kept open for automobiles, and the crossing refugees; the spectators stood on the edge of the northern pavement only, and in some cases on the top of bricks that represented an outer wall. A number of the refugees were marching towards the ferries, although a curtain of smoke bounded the lower end of Market Street. Others were moving stolidly towards the western hills. All were burdened with pillow-cases packed with clothing, or dragged trunks, cribs, baby-carriages, in which was a strange assortment of utensils, children, and household pets. The scrape, scrape of these unwieldy objects could be heard in a monotonous reiteration above the distant roar and crackling of the flames. Behind the tide of humanity rolling in from the burning district, at the end of every street, was a vista of flame and smoke. And the dark clouds were mounting higher and higher, lit with a million golden sparks. The temperature was tropical.

People were already beginning to talk in phrases: The doomed city. The fire zone. Razed to the ground. Brains were not active, and any one energetic enough to put a few expressive words together was sure of disciples. Here, more than elsewhere, it was apparent that the army was in possession of the city. Mounted officers rode slowly up and down, and at the mouth of each of those dusky and menacing avenues was a guard with drawn bayonets. They permitted the unfortunate to emerge, but few to enter. In spite of the audible energy of the

fire, the slow tramp of the refugees, the scraping of their furniture on the ill-paved streets, the city was extraordinarily silent. People scarcely spoke above a mutter. There was no shouting of orders. Even the children were not whimpering, the tawdry women were not hysterical, not a parrot raised his voice nor a dog whined Faces were dazed, blank, imprinted with a stolid determination to get to a place of safety and keep families and belongings together. The present moment was as much as they could grasp, and truth to tell there was a good deal in it.

Some of the sightseers speculated mildly—those that owned no property in this district—as to what would happen if the wind drove the fire much farther north. The opposite side of the street was lined with some of the greatest business houses in the city. The Palace Hotel looked like the rock of Gibraltar. Not a vase in its court had been overturned, some one said. The other buildings were of stone, brick, concrete. They had stood the earthquake; even the great square tower of the Call Building, unsupported by other buildings, had barely lost a cornice. Was it possible that the fire would take them? But the fire was rolling nearer every moment, for it met little to resist it but wood. Down by East Street several of the Market Street buildings were blazing. But no doubt the marines would extinguish those, and surely that sea of flame would break and retreat before the wall of rock opposite; and behind it were other structures of stone and brick and concrete. Now and then a refugee, permitting his attention to be drawn from his own little affairs, told that the back windows of these buildings were already hung with wet blankets, and that people stood by the cisterns



on the roofs, hose in hand. But the South of Market Street fraternity shook a united head, and when the new phrase, The doomed city, was wafted into its dull ears, it adopted it promptly, and marched on muttering it over and over.

XI

ALREADY a number of automobiles had flown by, some filled with people anxious to leave town before it might be too late, but most of them containing surgeons and their assistants, or relays of firemen, alone permitted to enter the burning district; or prominent men bound for the citizens' meeting to be held in the cellar of the old jail in Portsmouth Square, a site upon which their ancestors had gambled and Jenny Lind had sung. Gwynne, who was already beginning to chafe at inaction, to feel the excited blood shake his pulses, was revolving excuses to send his mother and Isabel home, when an automobile came charging down Market Street at a terrific rate of speed. From some distance he recognized Hofer sitting beside the chauffeur. Not in the least considering his act, he stepped in front of the crowd and made a signal. Hofer responded with a shout, the automobile slowed slightly, two men stood up and clutched Gwynne, dragging him into the machine. Gwynne's long legs flew backward as if he were plunging head first over an embankment, and he had only time to right himself, turn and shout "Go home," before the automobile had regained its speed and was out of sight.

Victoria turned to Isabel with wide eyes. "It looked like kidnapping!" she exclaimed.

"I fancy they merely want him at the citizens' meeting.

No doubt they want every steady clear brain they can muster. I think I had better go out and see what has become of Paula and the children. Will you come?"

Victoria shook her head. "This is all too interesting," she said. "I must see more of it, and I am no longer afraid. When I am tired I will go home. Shall we agree to meet there for luncheon?"

Isabel nodded and started up Stockton Street alone, intending to take the first car that led in her sister's direction. Some of the trolley wires were down, but no doubt others were uninjured, and the cable-cars had always seemed to her as fixed as fate. She could no more conceive of their system being dislocated for more than an hour at a time than of the city burning. So far she was merely interested, and although sorry for the unfortunate poor, felt that the fates had conspired to do the city a service in cleaning out so objectionable a quarter. Of the millions invested in that district she did not think, but sighed as she thought of South Park and Rincon Hill. Still, they would have been obliterated in the course of events and before long; and as for the fire itself it would be stopped by the great walls of masonry on and near Market Street. She looked eastward down the deserted streets towards the bay, and although the vista there also was closed with flame and smoke, the fires were far away, and the marines were fighting it.

She passed many people ascending and descending, some with pressed lips, others arguing with a certain fettered excitement against the pessimistic attitude. After she left the business blocks the sidewalks again were free of débris, although she could see the ruin within. The disreputable section of this street, known as the "Red light

district," was crowded with women, to whose rescue or comfort no man would seem to have come. Isabel looked at them with an irresistible curiosity, but no sense of repulsion; she even stopped and answered their eager questions as best she could. She was possessed with the idea that there was but one person in San Francisco that day, no matter what the optical delusion. She was not at all dazed, but utterly impersonal.

Even in the blazing sunshine most of these women were handsome, and young. But all assurance was gone; when not strained and haggard from the recent and the menacing terror, they looked indescribably forlorn. But they were very quiet. Isabel heard but one excited cry, and something of its thrill ran along her own nerves. "My God! The wind is blowing from the southeast and it's blowing strong!"

Isabel glanced back. It seemed to her that the great suspended waves of smoke, red-lined, were rolling with more energy, and they certainly were inclining west as well as north. She wondered, with some irritation, why the wind blew from the southeast when the first of the trades should be roaring in from the Pacific. A strong steady west wind and the fire would be blown towards the bay, where it could be extinguished from the marine boats. Every time a gust ruffled her hair she shook her head irritably, wondering that she had ever loved the wind.

She reached California Street. The cars were not running. Far down where they should have started she saw nothing but smoke. Nor was there the usual rumble indicating that the cable was at work, a sound which was among the first of her memories. She turned west and climbed the almost perpendicular blocks to the summit of

Nob Hill. The beautiful massive pile of white stone, to be known when finished as Fairmont Hotel, and which had already done so much to redeem the city from its architectural madness, looked as serene and unravaged as if it crowned a hill of ancient Athens; but so, for that matter, did its neighbors, two as faultless in their way; the others appearing even more outrageous than usual, inasmuch as they had had their opportunity to disappear and failed to take advantage of it.

From the summit of the hill Isabel gave a hasty glance southward, then walked rapidly west; the fires seemed to cover far more ground than when she had first looked at them from Russian Hill, an hour ago.

After she had tripped over two large paving-stones that had met in an upward bulge, she took more note of detail. Some of the houses had private cisterns, and their roofs and walls were still quite wet. Pretentious g··den walls, and stone pillars supporting façades, had fallen, while next door an apparently more delicate structure was intact. It seemed to be a matter of foundation. And everywhere there were groups of silent people watching the fire. Even when the Red Cross men and women carried out the injured, Isabel did not hear a groan. And all were losing their dazed and frightened expressions. The careless philosophy of the city was reasserting itself, although in a more dignified phase.

At Van Ness Avenue, the wide street that runs through the residence part of the city from north to south, Isabel shuddered for the first time, and, as she was ashamed to run across, stood and stared with a new sense of fascination at the inexplicable old earth. The street lay in a narrow valley, what would have been a mere cañon in the moun-

tains, and the soil was loose and sandy, although the great houses sat upon most of the brief level and held it firm. But the stone blocks in low garden walls were bulging and broken, and the street itself was horribly torn. Here and there it had sunken, and looked as if a wave had passed over it and left an impress. A large stone church had fallen, one tower into the street and another upon the neighboring house. The stone walls of houses were cracked; one of the "mansions" had a zigzag crevice from top to bottom.

And the proudest had brought forth chairs and were sitting in their gardens or on the pavement. Isabel recognized a girl who had been one of the belles of Mrs. Hofer's ball, clad in a bath-gown and a pair of socks, and another, noted for her gowns, passed in a wagon, a handkerchief tied about her head and a half-filled pillow-case on her lap. Isabel knew that both had lived in one of the beautiful private hotels on the avenue, and she had already heard that it was so badly wrecked that the guests had been thankful to get out alive and had not ventured to return for their clothes. The stately building had been run up in a night, its feet set in sand, and the wonder was it was not lying across the avenue.

Many of the refugees had already reached this third and last wide street of refuge, and although the greater number were still down at the southern end, others had pushed on, intending to walk to the Presidio, where they were likely to be fed. They were resting on their cumbrous belongings, strange groups, unkempt and half dressed. Many of the householders had sent within for food, and one wealthy dame, whose maid had had time to build her coiffure and groom her properly, sat with a

dirty frowsy baby on her lap and was coaxing it to take milk from a spoon, its bottle having been overlooked in the flight. The mother was sitting on the bureau her husband had rescued, by no means abashed, nor even surprised.

Isabel crossed the street and ascended and descended again, traversed several blocks to the north, and finally approached the house in which the Stones had their apartment. Although high-perched, it was uninjured, and as Isabel climbed the hill she saw Paula and her children seated, with many others, on the long flight of steps. Paula waved her hand and walked down composedly to meet her sister. She was dressed, laced, and painted. A sufficient time had elapsed since the earthquake to permit her ruling passion to regain its throne.

"Well, I am glad to see you!" She greeted Isabel with something of the grand air. She felt almost pompous with the sense of playing her part in a great event, fancied herself, perhaps, its central figure. "Of course, I knew you were all right up there, especially as we came off fairly well. But you should have been here. You've missed it!"

"I know," said Isabel, humbly. "But I am glad you were not hurt. And not frightened?"

"Oh, fearfully. And being up so many flights of stairs made it seem so much worse. But Lyster and I managed to get out of bed and into the nursery before it was half over, and hold the children in the doorways. I didn't make a fool of myself like so many others, and run out in the street before I was dressed; my hair was up on pins. Lys was more frightened than I was—it's a wonder he has any nerves at all—and now that there are so many fires he is fearfully excited at the idea that all his favorite haunts may

[illegible]

[illegible] and every- [illegible] with the [illegible] Mrs. Brooks, who [illegible] and has [illegible] You had better stop, too."

"I have promised [illegible] to return. Just suppose the fire should come out here, what should you do?"

"Oh, take a mattress or two out to the Presidio. It's not far, and would be a regular picnic. But it won't."

"Well, I'll go, then. If you change your mind you can



have the launch. Only come to me first. Mr. Clatt is standing over it with a six-shooter."

"Thanks. Sorry you won't come in. Lys won't sit down for about a week, he's *that* nervous, so you'll probably see him up on the Hill."

Isabel started for home, and when she reached Fillmore Street discovered that she was tired. It was then that she regretted not having reserved a dollar or two; but no doubt Victoria was at home by this time. She found a livery-stable, and asked the proprietor, lounging in the entrance, if he could send her to the foot of her bluff.

"Yes, for fifty dollars," he said, coolly. Fillmore Street was a prosperous slum, another brief level between two steep acclivities. It was not yet aware of the proud destiny that awaited it, that for the next year or more it was to be the teeming centre of the abbreviated city's life, but there never was a time when it was burdened with manners, or the grand point of view. When Isabel stared, the man continued: "Yes, ma'am! Fifty's the ticket. And two hours later it may be five hundred. Some people are getting mighty nervous, and I've let five hacks and buggies already, at my own figure, to them as wants to get out of town quick."

Isabel turned her back on him, and climbed and descended again. Lower Van Ness Avenue was even more torn and lumpy than where she had crossed it at California Street, and hundreds of the South of Market Street refugees were sitting or lying in the middle of the street, worn out but stolid. Just beyond, she caught up with a teamster, who, noticing the fatigue in her eyes, stopped his horses and offered her a "lift," provided she was "going his way."

Isabel gratefully climbed to his high perch, after stating that she had no money, and being royally silenced.

"Oh, shucks!" said the man. "I guess this is the time to do other folks a good turn. You'd do the same for me, I'll bet. What do you think of this business, anyhow?"

Isabel replied hopefully, but he shook his head.

"City's doomed. Far as Van Ness, anyhow. Nothin' ain't goin' to stop that fire but water, and water's just what they haven't got. Lord! to think of that bay on three sides of the city. Talk about the Ancient Mariner. I don't live in the city, but I'll be sorry to see it go. Lord! warn't that a shake? I was flung plumb out of bed and against the wall, and the house next to mine, or the one I war in, went plumb out into the middle of the street. Lord! what a yellin' there was inside! Nobody hurt, but one woman went plumb out'r her mind. They've got her tied to the bed-post now. And what a lootin' of saloons there was until the soldiers marched in! Now, I hear, that there mayor has issued an order, which is to be pasted up all over, that any man caught lootin' anything, saloons or otherwise, is to be shot dead and no questions asked. Good job, that. I guess we're in for high old times, miss. I'm makin' for Oakland, where I live. I brought in a load last evenin' and stopped over. Some of my friends live down by the ferry, and I'll pick them up, if they want to get out. Don't you want to come along? My wife and me 'll be glad to put you up if you can't do any better."

Isabel thanked him warmly, and assured him that she would be safe in any case, then discovered a loose half-dollar in the pocket of her jacket. The man accepted it philosophically.



"You were welcome to the ride, but I'm not the one to say nay to a bit of silver so long as you say you're not hard up yourself. Guess it 'll come in handy. Well, s'long. Good luck to you. I've enjoyed your society very much."

XII

THE teamster had deposited her at Taylor and Jackson streets, and as she passed the Trennahans' door it occurred to her to ask how they fared. The house appeared to be uninjured, but the electric bell was useless, and it was not until she had knocked several times that an old Mexican servant answered the summons. Then she learned that the family had left for Menlo Park in their touring car immediately after the earthquake, as the boys were at the country-house with their tutor. The woman had been maid for many years to Mrs. Polk and had lived with Magdaléna since her aunt's death. She was a privileged character, and during Isabel's visit had accepted her relationship to the house of Yorba and waited on her personally.

"So tired you look," she said. "Come in, no?" Then, as the invitation was declined, she leaned her stout shapeless figure against the door-frame and begged Isabel for an account of her experience. Isabel gave it briefly, and the old woman shook her head. "So terreeblay thing!" she sighed. "Seventy years I live in California and this the more bad earthquake I never feel. My mother she feel the great earthquake of 1812 in the south, when the padres plant a long straight branch in the middle of the square of San Gabriel, and it never stop shake for four months. Ay yi, California! I theenk we all go into the

bay this morning, and I fall down twice when I run to see how little Señorita Inez she feeling. Ay yi!"

"Why did you not go to the country?"

"And who take care the house? The car come back bime-by for the other servants, but I no go. Si, I can go in the train—then—perhaps. But no in automobilia. Is devil, no less."

"Well, if you should be frightened come up to me," and Isabel went on hurriedly to her own home, suddenly reminded of the uncertainty of her relative's nerves. But Victoria was standing on the porch staring outward with such an intensity of gaze that she took no notice of Isabel's approach. And when Isabel reached her side, she too stood silent for a time. *The Call* Building was on fire. This square tower of seventeen stories and a dome, with some seventy windows on each side, had caught fire at the top, and as the flames devoured the contents of one floor as quickly as possible that they might dart down another flight and gorge themselves anew, in an incredibly short time the two hundred windows in sight, and no doubt those in the rear, were spouting flames like the mouths of so many cannon: each sharply defined, owing to the indestructible nature of the walls. Volumes of white smoke poured upward to be lost in the black clouds above. At times the fire and smoke, on either side, torn by the wind, seemed to dance and gyrate in a Bacchanalian revel, taking monstrous forms, that exploded in showers of sparks, glittering like the fabled California sands. Above the burning district the smoke clouds changed form constantly. Sometimes they reeled along like colossal water-spouts. The roar of the fire waxed louder as one listened to it: a deep persistent energetic roar, as

of a sea climbing over a land its time had come to devour.

Suddenly a curtain of smoke swept down and obliterated the scene, conveying a sense of respite, challenging the memory, although a moment later it was shot with a million sparks.

Victoria announced briefly that they were to have lunch of a sort, but for her part she would prefer a bath.

A bath, however, was out of the question, and, without washing the cinders from their faces and hands, they sat down to beefsteak fried on one of the oil-stoves used for heating the Mansard story, and canned vegetables. That much indulgence they might have permitted themselves, but human nature is prone to extremes, and they were tuned to a severe economy that might embrace more than water for some weeks to come.

Isabel sent a plate of sandwiches and a bottle of beer down to Mr. Clatt, and the servant returned with the information that the faithful wharfinger was sitting on a chair in front of the launch, a pistol on his lap; and that already a small crowd was crouched like buzzards in front of him. Isabel asked Victoria if she cared to retreat, but the older woman shook her head.

"Do you?" she asked.

"Oh no. I shall remain until the last minute, certainly until I know what Elton's plans are. If the launch is seized we can go down to Fort Mason or out to the Presidio. Every one is in the same boat. I should hate being too comfortable. But I don't think you should sleep out-of-doors. It is always damp at night."

"I can stand as much as you can. I am quite fit again. And this is the first time, for heaven knows how many years,

that anything has interested me. I shall stay till the last minute; and surely no fire could climb this hill. Did I tell you that Mr. Trennahan came up at once and asked me to go to Menlo Park with them? Ungrateful—but I have not thought of it since."

Isabel announced her intention to take a nap. "No one knows what may happen to-night," she said. "And I feel as if I had not slept for a week."

She fell asleep at once. Lady Victoria awakened her by bursting unceremoniously into her room.

"You must get up and look!" she cried. "The Palace Hotel and the other big newspaper buildings are on fire. The sight is something awful—and wonderful."

Isabel ran to the window. All the valley was a rolling sea of flame, and all space seemed to be filled with enormous surging billows of smoke. From every window of the Palace Hotel, an immense square building of some seven stories, from the great newspaper buildings, and from other brick and stone structures near by, tongues of flame were leaping; the wooden buildings were mere shapeless furnaces. Again a volume of smoke descended, and for the moment nothing was to be seen but a red blur somewhere in the midst of rolling black.

Victoria communicated to Isabel the information she had received from the neighbors, always coming and going. People were pouring out of the city, not only by the Southern Pacific boats to Oakland, and indirectly to Berkeley and Alameda, but by freight-boats and launches to the Marin towns. They were obliged to make a long détour round the base of the northern hills, as the water-front and the streets behind were a roaring furnace, although the fires had not crossed East Street. All houses in the towns

across the bay had opened to the refugees, tents had been erected in the public squares, and emergency hospitals had been started before nine o'clock. The militia had been called out to assist the regulars, and also the Cadet Battalion of the State University. A Citizens' Patrol had been formed to protect the still unburned districts, each man provided with arms at the Presidio. People on the lower slopes were now in full flight towards the western parks and hills, as well as the Presidio, many being under the impression that the ferry-boats were not running. It was doubtful if a hotel or a boarding-house would harbor a soul that night; not east of Van Ness Avenue, at least, and many in that region were preparing to sleep in the Park and squares, lest the fire attack them from the south. Refugees, exhausted, were lying on the doorsteps and in the streets of the Western Addition.

Victoria relapsed into silence and Isabel gazed down upon the beautiful terrible scene—the curtain had rolled upward again—at the enormous tongues of flame leaping from every window, the showers of golden sparks, the swooping and soaring clouds, many of them white, with convoluted edges, and faintly tinted like the day smoke of Vesuvius. These curled white masses rolled among the black waves towards the west, and the low deep roar waxed louder as one listened to it.

All the wooden bow-windows of the Palace Hotel had been eaten off, but it would be hours before the stoutly built old hotel ceased to feed the flames. Sometimes sheets of fire seemed to drive from the apertures across the great width of Market Street, to be beaten back by a solid wall of flame. In the intense clear yellow light that bathed the street Isabel could see the twisted car tracks. More than

once she fancied she saw a prostrate body, but it may have been an achievement of the shifting flames, and certainly nothing living moved down there. The mounted officers and their men were patrolling the blocks along all the northern front of the fire.

"Are you not in the least worried about Elton?" asked Isabel, abruptly.

"Not a bit. I never worried about him when he was a child. He was always the most agile and ready youngster I ever saw."

"But he is very venturesome. He might be caught in one of those furnaces as well as another, or killed by falling bricks."

"He is a man of destiny," said Victoria indifferently. 'He will live to accomplish what he was born for."

Isabel, in truth, found worry as impossible as any other common emotion, nevertheless thought it odd that he did not come to them for a moment or send a message. She could appreciate his wholly masculine mood, his temporary indifference to the charms of her sex, but he had an ingrained sense of responsibility, and was more considerate than the average man.

Lady Victoria returned to her vantage-point on the veranda, and Isabel went down to the garden fence where the three Japs were standing, and asked them if they intended to remain—half the servants had already fled from the city. Two replied that later in the day they should go to Oakland where they had friends. Isabel told them that she should not part with what little money there was in the house, and they answered politely that they expected to wait for their wages. The oldest of the three, a respectable man of thirty, who looked like, and

no doubt was, a student, announced his intention to remain.

"I can cook," he added. "Not well, but perhaps well enough for a few days. And perhaps if we are driven out I may go to the country with you. I should be willing to work for anything you could pay me until things were restored to their normal condition—if you would be good enough to give me my evenings for study."

Isabel promised him the protection of her ranch-house, and stood talking to him for some time. His English was unusually correct and his remarks were more intelligent than those of the average man of her acquaintance. He told her something of Japanese earthquakes, and was good enough to add that he had never felt quite so violent or so peculiar a series of earth movements as California had achieved that morning. He was curious to see the result as recorded on the seismograph, and to know at what hour it registered in Japan.

"I think Professor Omori will come over," he said, modestly. "This earthquake will interest him very much. He will wish to study the ground."

"Were you not frightened?" asked Isabel, curiously.

"I appreciated the danger, but frightened—no, miss, I think I have never felt frightened. But I do not like fire. I have seen Tokio burn. I shall walk about constantly and see that it does not steal upon us from the north or west. Some silly person might make a fire, and all the chimneys must be cracked."

"I feel much relieved to know that you will patrol," said Isabel, wondering if she were being gracious to a prince. "Would you mind going up to the top of the hill and asking some one if he knows whether all the injured were

taken from the Mechanics' Pavilion? It is blazing like a wood pile."

He went up the hill and returned with the information that all the patients, as well as the doctors and nurses, had been taken out, the last of them while the roof was blazing, and conveyed in automobiles to other emergency hospitals far away; and that the prisoners in the City Hall had been transported, manacled, to the army prisons in the same manner.

"One of the gentlemen said he saw Mr. Gwynne running an automobile full of nurses and patients—one of Mr. Hofer's machines," he added. "And that he returned twice at least. All the young men that own machines are acting very well, they say, transporting the injured, and making themselves generally useful. Many are on the roofs of the greater buildings with the firemen fighting the fire with blankets, and hose attached to the cisterns. A few buildings have been saved in that way, but not many, and more or less of the water has to be turned on the men, who catch fire repeatedly from the sparks."

Isabel went into the house and put on her hat. "I cannot keep still any longer," she said to Victoria, a moment later. "And now I am quite rested. I shall go down and see Mrs. Hofer, and reconnoitre for myself. If Elton should come, ask him to wait for me here—he must need a rest—or walk down Taylor Street."



XIII

SHE found her lower neighbors still sitting on their doorsteps or standing in groups, but was told that many more had already gone out to the Western Addition with their valuables, fearing that the fire might come up the southern or eastern slopes before night. A large touring car was standing in front of the Hofers' door. The children and their nurses were in it, and Mr. Toole came out and took his place as Isabel reached the house. He greeted her for the first time since she had known him without a smile; and he looked very old and sad. Isabel heard Mrs. Hofer's light high rapid voice within. She was standing in the large drawing-room, giving orders to a group of servants. When she saw Isabel she cried out as if confronted with a ghost.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, but not kissing her as usual; her mind apparently was divided into many parts. "I am relieved to see that *you* are all right. I didn't know what might have happened up State. Did you *ever?* Well! —Great old country this. Talk about living on the side of Vesuvius. And now everything is going, everything!"

"I keep hoping for a change of wind."

"Perhaps, but I've pretty well given it up. We are in disgrace to-day, sure enough. And anyhow Mr. Hofer has lost millions, millions! However—" She recovered

herself with a bound. "He made them, so I guess he can make more. And do you know what he's thinking about already? He burst in here half an hour ago—as black as your hat—with orders that I should take the family down to Burlingame at once, and then began talking about the Burnham plans, and the opportunity to clean up the city politically. There's a raging idealist for you. And do you know what he and Mr. Gwynne are up to now? Carrying dynamite, no less, between Fort Mason and the fire line. The two of them are running an automobile apiece and have put themselves at the disposal of the authorities. Nice thing for me to be thinking of all night. Don't you want to come along?"

Isabel shook her head.

"Well, I'll move on then—before they change their minds and impress my car. So far I have a gracious permit to keep it. The servants have buried the silver and the pictures, but—" She glanced at the beautiful frieze, which, without its electric lights, looked a mere blur of blue and black, then shrugged her shoulders. "I just won't believe my house will go," she said, defiantly; "not till the last minute, anyhow. When the fire's over, or Mr. Hofer lets me, I'll come back and do something for those poor wretches that have been burned out. Gather up what food there is to be had in the country, and start an eating station or something. Mr. Hofer says food will come pouring in from every direction presently, and then they will need organizers. I'm good at that. Can I rely on you? It will be an experience, anyhow; and of course it's my place to do that sort of thing. Besides, I do feel terribly sorry for those poor things, and I won't be able to sit still for a month."

"You can count on me. When this is over I shall find you somehow."

"Oh, don't worry. The newspapers won't miss anything. They're burned out, but I hear that the editors are already over in Oakland scurrying round after a plant. Well, *adios*. If you say the word I'll send the car back for you—although I doubt if it would pass a squad without those children in it. I suppose it would hold several tons of dynamite! Heigh-ho, I suppose it is all in the day's work. What can you expect if you live in an earthquake country?" They had reached the pavement and she put her lips close to Isabel's ear. "I'd like to get out of the damned place and never see it again," she whispered. "I'll keep a stiff upper lip, but those are my sentiments and I guess I have company."

She stepped lightly into the car, nodded with a grim gayety, and in another moment had disappeared round the corner of Taylor and California streets.

Isabel started down the hill, and almost immediately met Anne Montgomery. She had not recognized her as they approached each other, for the glare was in her eyes; but Miss Montgomery ran forward and kissed her.

"What on earth did you come to this God-forsaken place for, when you had the country to stay in?" she demanded. "Oh, Lady Victoria? I did not know she was here. Just come with me and look at a sight."

She put her arm through Isabel's and led her rapidly for several blocks along California Street, then down Hyde towards moving columns of people. The fire was far south of these refugees as yet, but they looked down every cross street and saw it; and more than once during their slow flight they had seen the soldiers at the visible end of

each long vista move a block farther north. "I tramped a long way with them," said Miss Montgomery, "carrying things for a woman I never saw before. Then a man took the burden over and I started up the hill to see how some friends were faring."

From this point they could hear the roar and crackle of the fire and the crashing of walls; but even more formidable was that tramping of thousands of feet, the scraping of trunks and furniture on the tracks and stones. Isabel, still feeling like a palimpsest, lingered for an hour looking at these refugees. They were vastly different, in all but their impotence, from those of the early morning. Hundreds were from the "boarding-house district"; others were householders; a large number, no doubt, owned their carriages or automobiles, but those had been impressed long since. It was a well and a carefully dressed crowd, for by this time nearly every one had recovered from the shock of the earthquake; many forgotten it, no doubt, in the new horror. They had not the blank expression of the poor, dazed by the second calamity following so close upon the heels of the first, but their lips were pressed, eyes were straining towards the distant goal, and all would have been pale but for the glare of the fire. Fortunately for most of them, men as well as women, they had either children, pets, or even more cumbersome belongings to claim their immediate attention; no time for either thought or despair. They pushed trunks to which skates had been attached, or pulled them by ropes; they trundled sewing-machines and pieces of small furniture, laden with bundles. Many carried pillow-cases, into which they had stuffed a favorite dress and hat, an extra pair of boots and a change of underclothing, some valuable

bibelot or bundle of documents; to say nothing of their jewels and what food they could lay hands on. Several women wore their furs, as an easier way of saving them, and children carried their dolls. Their state of mind was elemental. They lived acutely in the present moment and looked neither behind nor before—save to a goal of safety. Misfortune had descended upon them, and ruin no doubt would follow, but for the present they asked no more than to save what they could carry or propel, and to get far beyond that awful fire. The refinements of sentiment and all complexity were forgotten; they indulged in nothing so futile as complaint, nor even conversation. And the sense of the common calamity sustained them, no doubt, deindividualized them for the hour. Soon after they became their normal selves once more, and accepted the hard conditions of the following weeks with the philosophy that was to be expected of them. But underneath all the recovered gayety and defiant pride of the later time more than one spirit was sprained, haunted with a sense of dislocation, permanently saddened by the loss not of fortune but of personal treasures, of old homes full of life-long associations, never to be replaced nor regained. Many no doubt were better off for losing those old anchors that held them to the past and emphasized their years, besides keeping their sorrows green, but others had one reason less for living. Nevertheless the philosophy born of a lifetime in an earthquake country, of the electric climate, of their isolation, as well as the good Anglo-Saxon strain in so many of them, brought a genuine rebound to all physically capable of it, both old and young. But to-day they were primitive—and entirely human. They helped one another, the stronger carrying the weaker's burdens as



a matter of course. The men were bent almost double with increasing properties.

Isabel felt neither pity nor admiration for them; they were a mere unit, these thousands reduced to their primal component, the third fact in the great day of facts.

Suddenly, however, she caught sight of Lyster Stone. He carried a baby on one arm and several rolls of painted canvas under the other. Beside him walked the mother pushing a loaded crib; and behind him the artist friend, to whose aid he had evidently gone, dragged a large canvas trunk bound with an ingenious system of ropes. Stone nodded gayly when he saw Isabel.

"Hallo!" he cried. "I was going for you later on. We'll all sleep out to-night. Better come along." Then as Isabel only shook her head he said, hurriedly: "Awfully sorry I forgot—promised Gwynne I'd go up and tell you he was in for a long day's work—transporting hospital patients and hauling dynamite. He sent peremptory orders that you and his mother were to go to the country with the afternoon tide."

The crowd bore him on and Isabel and Anne walked up the hill again, meeting other streams of refugees, but thinner, as most of them preferred the easier slopes. Isabel looked at Anne curiously. There was an unusual restlessness about her, nothing of the rudimentary expression of the crowd. Isabel was wondering if her apparent and unusual spirits might be due to the fact that her flat was in the Western Addition, and that she had hired a wagon at the first alarm of fire and carried her silver to the Presidio, when Anne suddenly began to explain herself.

"Do you know," she broke out, "I have a wonderful sense of freedom!—of—of—hope. Something has hap-

pened at last. All the ruts have been ploughed over. Life will never be the same here, in my time at least. It will be like beginning all over again, with a hundred barely imagined possibilities and an equal chance for every one. It may be a reprehensible thing—to feel as if the destruction of your city had set your individual soul free—but I do, and that's the end of it. And I can tell you I've seen that *expression* in the eyes of many a man in the last few hours. Not in those of the older men, perhaps, for they wear out early enough in this climate, anyhow, and those that are close upon sixty don't look as if they had much left to live for—although I've seen a few flying about as if they had dropped thirty years; its all a matter of temperament and physique. But for the rest of us! The still energetic men, and the women that have been cankered with the tedium vitæ, and have the brains and brawn to work. It will be the Fifties all over again—not only something more than a bare living in prospect, but a constant, exciting, interest in life. I saw a good many men, just after the earthquake, looking as if they had believed the end of the world had come, but they braced up directly the city was threatened by something they could pit themselves against. Every man worth his salt is fighting fire, rescuing the helpless, dragging mattresses out to the hills and Park, and helping the women down here save their belongings. All with automobiles and carriages are helping the authorities and hospitals. Political factions and personal enemies are working side by side, particularly down on the fire line. Even the mayor has won a day's respect from his fellow-citizens, although I'm told he's terribly torn between the Committee of Fifty and the military authorities on the one hand, who want to blow up a wide zone, and the property-

holders who won't have their precious possessions sacrificed when the wind may change any minute. Meanwhile the fire has a headway that will give it the best part of the city. I never felt so alive in my life; so vividly in the present. Can you remember the name of a book you have read, that there is any world outside these seven square miles?"

"Yesterday is a mere dream and to-morrow is only a bare possibility! The Fifties! I feel as if we were at the beginning of things on another planet. I shall never trouble my head with problems or psychology again. We are mere dancing midgets on the scalp of stupendous forces that we do not even dimly apprehend. Earth lets us play until her patience is exhausted with our pretentions as mere human beings, at our insane delusion that the intellectual are not only the equal but the superior of the physical forces; and then she merely shakes herself, and the wisest is as helpless as the idiot, the prince even worse off than the pauper because he has a bigger house to run out of. They all dance to her tune like so many wooden marionettes. Hofer is no better off than his blacksmith—whose savings are probably in the fireproof vault of some bank, while I happen to know that more than one millionaire has not insured his Class A buildings, thinking the expense unnecessary. No wonder you have a sense of freedom. So have I. We are dancing to the tune of the unseen forces. They will do the thinking. I wonder, by-the-way, if deep down in the brain of that fleeing ruined tide of elemental beings there is not a prick of gratified vanity that they are in the midst of a great and horrible experience? We have been reading so much lately of the horrors in Russia, we have read, all our lives, of horrors and atrocities somewhere, and this State has grinned at us

so unintermittently. Now we, too, are actors in a great life-and-death drama. I don't fancy any one is doing even that much analysis, but I can't help thinking that the vague appreciation of the fact sustains them in a way—possibly gives them a calm sense of superiority to the rest of the world——Look at this."

They had reached Jackson Street on the flat of Nob Hill. It was now evening and the exodus from Chinatown had begun. The Mongolians were streaming up from their threatened quarter, and, like the others, tramping silently out to the Presidio. The merchants had put on their fine clothes, and their families—exposed to the Occidental eye for the first time—wore gorgeous garments of bright silks covered with embroideries. The poor little respectable wives tottered along on their foolish feet, held up by their lords or their "big-footed" serving-women, while their children trudged along uncomplainingly and stared at the fire with big expressionless eyes. Mingling freely with the wealthy autocrats of Chinatown were the coolies, and the disreputable women with which the quarter swarmed. The Chinese rarely import their wives. The coolies wore their blue blouses and soft felt hats, and the women had painted their faces and built up their hair as usual, shining tower-like coiffures stuck with large-lobed pins, cheap or costly, according to their grade. All were as stolid as their own wooden gods. They would have looked like a solemn procession on a festa day had it not been for the bundles and strong-chests they carried.

"Come up to dinner, such as it is," said Isabel, to Anne. "What are you going to do to-night?"

"Camp down in the sand-lots by Fort Mason and see what I can do for those poor refugees. There will be great

suffering, I am afraid. Many women should be in hospital with every attention; and with all this excitement who knows what may happen? I fancy either a tent-hospital will be erected, or the worst cases will be taken into the fort. I am a good nurse, and I told the Leader I should be there. There will be many children to look after, too. The parents, the best of them, won't be up to much."

"Perhaps I will go down later. But I shall wait at the house until I have seen Mr. Gwynne—he may need food, or be hurt in any of a dozen ways. If you see him—and no doubt you will, if you are to be at the fort—tell him that I have not gone to the country and have no intention of going."

XIV

THEY had passed members of the Citizens' Patrol on every block, and they found one pacing the plank walk on Russian Hill. He told them that the edict had gone forth that not so much as a candle should be lit in a house that night and that all cooking must be done out-of-doors. The spectacled Jap was boiling soup on one of the oil stoves, which he had carried into the garden and half surrounded by a screen. Beside him was what looked like an open newly-dug grave, and the girls, startled, demanded what it meant.

Sugihara, apparently, never smiled, but his eyes flickered. "Before Cusha and Kuranaga went I made them dig a hole for the silver," he said. "It is too heavy for the launch. If we are driven away, I will cut your ancestors from their frames and take them with us."

"Well, you are a treasure," said Isabel, with a sigh. "You shall do nothing but read when you get to the ranch."

Lady Victoria was pacing slowly up and down the porch, her eyes seldom wandering from the fire. When dinner was ready, she merely shook her head impatiently, and Isabel and her guest sat down in the little tower-room, which was brilliantly illuminated from below. Sugihara had made a very good soup of canned corn and tomatoes and had fried bits of meat and potato. There was little conversation. The dynamiting was now something more

than sporadic. The detonations were so terrific that it was not difficult for the San Franciscans to imagine themselves—supposing they had a grain of imagination left—in a besieged city. Isabel suggested, and Anne agreed with her, that they might have been far worse off than they were; nature at her extremest is never so pitiless as the human brute when the lust to kill is on him.

Isabel prepared the remains of the feast for Mr. Clatt, and asked Sugihara if he would object to relieving the watch, that the wharfinger might snatch a few hours' sleep. There was no longer any danger of fire except from the conflagration itself, and now that the dynamiting had begun in earnest it was possible that the flames would be isolated before midnight.

The Jap went off with the dish in one hand and a book in the other, hoping that he would be allowed to light a candle on the launch. He returned in a few moments, and for the first time he was smiling.

"Mr. Clatt will not give up his watch," he said. "He says he might miss the chance to put a hole in some—dago (his language was very bad, Miss). He says there's not a wink of sleep in him."

"No doubt but that he will hold on to it, unless the military step in," said Anne. "Then, I fancy, he would surrender very meekly. They have impressed a good many launches for prisoners and dynamite. But I hope not, for whether the fire comes up the hills or not, there is going to be terrible privation. Heaven knows how many days it will be before we have enough water even to drink, and I heard a little while ago that as soon as food comes in the authorities will establish relief stations, where everybody, from the millionaire to John Chinaman, will have

to stand in line and wait for his loaf of bread. Wouldn't it be better for you to go at once?"

"I fancy I can endure as much as any one, and if I am driven from here I will go down to you. I shall go down anyhow when I have seen Mr. Gwynne. I do not propose to lie in a hammock while several hundred thousand people are sleeping on the ground. What do you take me for?"

"Somehow I don't see you as a nurse, or amusing children, or doling out bread and raiment. You would be much more in the picture encouraging Mr. Gwynne. However—I am going to impress your linen and a clothes-basket to carry it in. No doubt the philosophical Sugihara will help me carry it to the fort."

"Take what you like." Isabel directed her to the linen-closet, and went down to the veranda. She paused abruptly in the doorway. Victoria's face could be seen only in profile, but its expression, as she gazed down upon that tossing twisting furious flame ocean, needed no analytical faculty to interpret. It was voluptuous, ecstatic.

Isabel crossed the porch in a stride.

"What are you thinking of?" she demanded, imperiously.

Victoria did not turn with a start. She did not turn at all. "I am thinking," she replied, automatically, as if in obedience to the stronger will—"I am thinking that at last I understand what it is we are so blindly striving for from the hour when we can think at all; what it is—that unsatisfied desire that urges us on and on to so many fatal experiments in the pursuit of happiness. The great goal, the real meaning of our miserable balked mortal existence is not that dancing will-o'-the-wisp we call happiness, for want of a better name. It is Death."

"Well?" Isabel's voice rose, but she kept the anxiety out of it.

"I cannot imagine anything more delicious," went on Victoria, in the same low rich tones, "than to walk straight down those hills and into that sea of flame. I have always admired Empedocles, who cast himself into Etna. Once I saw a friend cremated, and the brief vision of that white incandescence, before the coffin shot down, seemed to me the apotheosis, the voluptuous poetry of death. I could walk down into that colossal furnace without flinching, and I believe that my last moment, as the world disappeared behind me, and those superb flames took me into their embrace, would be one of sublimest ecstasy."

Isabel caught her by the shoulders and whirled her about. "Well, you will do nothing of the sort," she cried, roughly. "In the first place you couldn't get through the lines, and in the second you are wanted at Fort Mason. Anne is going down with a basket of linen for the poor women who will be confined to-night. You are an uncommonly strong woman, and you can make use of every bit of your strength. Anne and the Leader are frail creatures, and no one else that I know of is going. They need you, and you will soon have your hands so full that your head will be purged of this nonsense. It is the fire lust—the same lust that incited a boy to-day to attempt to set fire to a house in this district that he might watch the whole city burn. I hope your egoism exploded in that climax. Here comes Anne. You must go."

"Very well," said Victoria, suddenly dazed, and with a will relaxed after the long tension of the day. "I will go."

"Where are your jewels?"

"Down in the bank."

"Well, gather up any other small things you treasure, and either conceal them about you or give them to me."

"I shall not take anything. My laces are in the chiffonnière. I do not care to enter the house again."

Isabel fetched her hat and jacket, for in spite of the fire it would be cold near the water; and a few moments later she stood on the edge of Green and Jones streets, on the other side of the hill, and watched Victoria and Anne, carrying a large clothes-basket between them, carefully making their way down to the level. They had a walk of some thirteen blocks before them, but the streets were full of people and of ruddy light.

She returned to the house and sat down on the porch, her eyes diverted from the fire for a moment by the picture of Sugihara, a pair of eye-glasses in front of his spectacles, comfortably established on a chair in the garden and reading by the lamp of the burning city. It was apparent that he had forgotten the 18th of April.

Isabel was alone but a moment. Stone burst in upon her. He had approached from behind, and came running down the hill.

"Isabel," he cried. "Get a bottle of champagne."

"Champagne?"

"Yes. It may be six months before I see another—but that is a mere detail. I want to drink to the old city."

Isabel, who liked him best in his dramatic moments, found a bottle of champagne. He knocked the head off, and filling the glass, went down to the first landing of the long narrow flight of steps. He held the glass high, pointing it first towards the middle of what had been Market Street, and was now a river of fire, then slowly shifting it along towards Kearney and Montgomery, as he named the res-



taurants that had given San Francisco no mean part of her fame.

"Here's to Zinkand's, Tait's, The Palace Grill! The Poodle Dog! Marchand's! The Pup! Delmonico's! Coppa's! The Fashion! The Hotel de France! And here's to the Cocktail Route, the Tenderloin, and the Bohemian Club! And here's—" By this time his voice was dissolving, and the glass was describing eccentric curves. "Here's to the old city, whose like will never be seen this side of hell again. Pretty good imitation of heaven in spots, and everything you chose to look for, anyway. And the prettiest women, the best fellows, the greatest all-night life, the finest cooking, the wickedest climate. Here's to San Francisco—and damn the bounder that calls her 'Frisco!"

Then he drank what was left of the contents of his glass and hastily refilled it. After he had finished the bottle luxuriously, he held out his hand to Isabel. "Come along?" he asked. Then, as she shook her head: "I must go back to Paula and the kids. The mattresses are out in the Park already. You are in no danger, what with the neighbors above and the patrol. Good luck to you," and he vanished.

Isabel was alone at last, a state she had unconsciously wished for all day—it seemed a month since the morning. She sat down and leaned her elbows on the railing. Now that the sun was gone, the heavens, or the smoke obscuring them, were as red as that sea beneath which seemed to devour a house a minute as it rolled out towards the Mission and worked with all its might among the great business blocks between Market Street and Telegraph Hill. Some one had estimated that the columns of fire

were seven miles high, and they certainly looked as if they had melted the very stars. Here and there was a play of blue flames, doubtless from some explosive substance, and when the dynamite shot the entrails from a house there was a gorgeous display of fireworks—the golden showers of sparks symbolizing the treasure that blackened and crumbled in dropping back to earth.

Before sitting down she had swept the distant hills with her field-glass and seen thousands of people lying not ten feet apart, like an exhausted army after battle. In that intense glare she could even study the eccentric positions of the fallen headstones and monuments in the old deserted cemeteries—Lone Mountain and Calvary. The cross on the lofty point of the bare hill behind the Catholic cemetery was red against the blackness of the west; and hundreds of weary mortals were huddled about its base. She tried to pity all those terrified uncomfortable creatures out there, but again the part they played in the greatest natural drama of modern times occurred to her, and she thought that should console them.

She wondered at her lack of sentimental regret at the destruction of her beloved city. But sentiment seemed a mere drop of insult to be cast into that ocean of calamity. Moreover, she was pricked by a sense that it was a living sentient thing, that city, and was getting its just dues for the hearts it had devoured, the lives it had ruined, the merciless clutch it had kept upon so many that were made for better things. To its vice she gave little thought; she fancied it was not worse than other cities, if the truth were known; it was the picturesqueness of its methods that had held it in the limelight. But that it was one of the world's juggernauts, and the more cruel for its

ever laughing beguiling face—of that there was no manner of doubt.

She wondered also that she was not in a fever of anxiety about Gwynne. She had interrogated the sentry and been informed that the automobiles carrying dynamite dashed straight down to the fire line, often within; that a number of the soldiers, whose duty it was to lay the explosive, had been wounded and carried to the hospitals; that there was always the risk of a laden machine being suddenly surrounded by fire, for many houses were ignited by the sparks, and, in that wooden district down there, burned like tinder. Perhaps, like Victoria, she was too sure of his destiny; perhaps the picture of the future with him that she had conceived refused to alter its lines; or it may be that there was no place in the impersonal arrangement of her faculties the double catastrophe had effected, for fear; or for anything beyond the impressions of the moment. Her mind worked on mechanically. She was determined to remain as long as there was a possibility of Gwynne's returning for food or care. But the soul beneath was possessed by an absolute calm. She had the sense of having been taken into partnership with nature that morning; so sudden and personal had been that assault, from which she yet had issued unscathed. She felt that everything that would follow in life, excepting only her love for Gwynne, would be too petty to regard more seriously than the daily meals. Not that she had more than a bare mental appreciation of the phases of love at the moment; but it possessed her and it was infinite.

She sat motionless until nearly two o'clock and then went up to her room and lay down. It was not possible to

sleep for more than a few moments at a time, for the detonations were almost incessant, but she forced herself to rest, not knowing what work the morrow might have in store. When she finally rose and looked out of her window she saw that the fire was coming up the hills.



XV

SHE barely touched the breakfast prepared by the methodical Sugihara, who had already buried the silver, and cut the pictures from their frames, rolled, and tied them securely.

"It is only a question of a few hours," he said. "The dynamiting so far has done more harm than good. They take a house at a time instead of a block, and as it falls apart it ignites another on the opposite side of the street. The army doesn't like to interfere, and the mayor has too long been obsequious to capital. Mr. Clatt is still there with the launch behind him. I took him down his breakfast some time ago. He told me to tell you that he'd 'got his job cut out for him now, as the Dagos were beginning to leave Telegraph Hill.'"

Isabel had one or two moments of panic as she watched those waves of flame beat up the hill, and pictured them raging up the eastern slopes as well; but the panic passed, for she knew that there were two exits still open. The heavens were black. A disk like a sealing-wax wafer indicated the position of the sun. The heat was terrific. The dynamiting was incessant, but it did not drown the roar and the eager furious crackle of the flames, the reverberating crash of falling walls. And the flames were the redder for the blackness above. Cinders were falling all over the heights, and the smoke burned the eyes.

"I shall feel like Casabianca presently, and rather ridiculous," she reflected, "but I shall stay till the last possible moment." She went within and packed a pillow-case with Lady Victoria's laces and other portable objects of value and adornment, then gathered up similar belongings of her own, tied the case firmly about the neck, stood it where it could be snatched in flight, and returned to the porch.

The boarding-house district, several blocks of large wooden houses, seemed literally to be swept from its foundations by those rushing pillars of fire. The whole quarter was wiped out in an hour, and then the fire turned its attention to the higher slopes.

It played with them for a while, darting west and returning for a morsel at which it leaped with the agility of a living monster, went west again; then, its appetite whetted and its greed insatiable, it started straight for Nob Hill. The soldiers drove the faithful servants out of the houses at the point of the bayonet. Then—in a moment—the familiar curtains were blowing out of the windows—shrivelled to a crisp and pursued by the red rage behind.

Sugihara did not go through the form of cooking luncheon. He knew that his mistress would not eat, and he had as little appetite himself. He folded his arms on the top of the fence and waited for the signal to retreat.

Isabel went into the house repeatedly and dipped her burning face into a basin of water, but returned quickly to her post. The fire was running from the east along California Street hill; she saw the men who had been cutting pictures from their frames in the Institute of Art flee to the west, then watched the Gothic structure flare



up and burn like an old hay-stack: that monument to a millionaire whose name would be already forgotten had it not been tacked to the gift. The fire reached California Street, on the edge of the plateau, from the south, coming up the west side of Taylor Street. Other great houses of the rich were so many roaring furnaces—several were curiously neglected and isolated by the fire, that seemed to have gone mad with its own lust. The eastern slopes were a mass of smouldering ruins, not black, but the most exquisite tints of violet, rose, chrome, gray, sepia, yellow. They looked, with their arches and columns, towers and broken walls, like the Roman Forum and the Palatine Hill on a colossal scale. About and through them floated clouds of fine white ashes, ghostly restless dust of unthinkable treasure.

Suddenly, hardly crediting her eyes, Isabel saw an automobile labor up the steep acclivity, through that swirling furnace, and dart across California Street and in the direction of Russian Hill. She knew that Gwynne was in it, and a moment later Hofer discharged him at the foot of the steps, then ran the car out Jackson Street at the top of its speed.

Gwynne walked up the steps and along the plank walk. Isabel recognized him by his carriage, for he was as black as a coal-heaver and most of his hair was burned off.

"I should like to wash first," he said, as he came up the house flight. "The water will go with the rest."

"Of course. Do you want anything to eat."

"No, I had some sandwiches a while ago."

He went up to his room and Isabel awaited him in the farthest corner of the living-room, where it may have been a trifle less hot and less noisy than elsewhere.

He came down in a moment. "That was a close shave," he said. "We didn't know what we were in for, and it was either go on and hope for better luck at the top, or dive down into a very good imitation of a live volcano."

He was recognizable, although his khaki clothes were black and burned, and one side of his head made him look as if he had just been discharged from a military hospital.

"I shall rest for a few moments and then go back," he said, throwing himself into a chair opposite Isabel. "I never forgot you, but I made sure Stone had delivered my message and that you were on the ranch. I saw my mother and Miss Montgomery an hour ago. You must get out of this at once."

"Tell me what you have been doing," said Isabel evasively.

"I have been alive," he said, intensely. "Never in all my days have I found life so wonderful. Battle is nothing to it. For the best part of two days I have been dodging the open jaws of death every minute; and the sensation of pitting one's puny human strength and the accumulated wit of several thousand years of varied civilization against an element in its might has inspired me with the only consummate approval of life that I have ever known——although I might have known it the day before yesterday if you had looked as you do now." He sat steadily regarding her for a few moments without speaking, but he was sensible of no immediate wish to touch her. That, too, belonged to a possibly greater but far different to-morrow. He was keyed very high. He did not feel himself so much a human being as a component part of one force disputing every inch of the progress of a mightier.

"Great God, what men!" he burst out. "I have been

with some member of the Committee of Fifty, on and off, these two days, to say nothing of last night—Mr. Phelan invited me to serve on it yesterday morning. They are superb, not daunted for a moment, talking already of the new city, of the opportunity this conflagration has given them to make it over in every way. Architects were engaged before three o'clock yesterday afternoon. And the young business men that have been cleaned out! They talk only of the enormous possibilities of the future. I remember reading once of much the same spirit exhibited by Londoners after the Great Fire. It is the most wonderful thing in the world that for a few days at least you are permitted to cherish an unleavened respect for human nature. Every mean cowardly and selfish trait that chains man to earth is moribund to-day, in the normal at least; and the rats have run to other holes. The higher qualities, those that have inspired the world since it began, are in full possession. And, by Jove, it is going to be the pioneer life over again! Do you remember that I regretted once I could not be in at the foundation and growth of a great city, also that the drawback to such an opportunity was that one was never conscious of his part? Well, now we are back to the conditions of the Fifties, and we know it. We shall work for tremendous stakes, and in no doubt of the result."

"The enthusiastic moment has come," said Isabel.

"Rather. Here is my part cut out for me. Here I stay and become a chief factor in making this city greater even than before. That is enough for any man. And there will be plenty of fight. Politics will crawl back to new strongholds, as soon as men become egos again, but I shall fight them here, not in the country."

He stood up, and Isabel asked, hastily: "Have you had no sleep?"

"Hofer and I broke into an empty house in the Western Addition towards morning and slept on the floor for three hours. I have known harder beds. I must go. I felt that I must look at you and order you to leave at once."

"I don't want to leave the city."

"You must go. The fire will have taken this house before midnight. You will be ordered out before that. They may save the city west of Van Ness Avenue, for the mayor at last has consented that several blocks shall be blown up at once. I am carrying dynamite. If I saw Russian Hill on fire and was not sure that you were out of harm's way, it would unnerve me, and I need all the nerve I've got."

"I can go down to Fort Mason."

"I want to know that you are out of the city. I think my mother is better off where she is. She is working with a will down there and absolutely refused to leave. I did not insist — no fire could cross those sand-lots, and I fancy she needs occupation. But you must go."

"I should be as safe."

"Perhaps. But I should be beset by fears that you had ventured too far. I can be quite impersonal, keen, steady of hand and brain, if you are out of the city."

"Very well, I will go."

'The day the fire is over I will go for you and we will marry and live in any shanty we can find—begin life together like any Forty-niners. You can help others as much

as you choose then. There will be work for all—but now there is not, cannot be until organization begins. And I must be free to take care of you. Will you go at once? The launch is still there."

"Yes, I will go at once."

He left her, and a few moments later she was walking down the other side of the hill, the voluminous pillow-case slung over her shoulder. Beside her trudged Sugihara, the ancestors under one arm, and his library under the other. The street along the water-front was a moving mass of refugees from Telegraph Hill, and Mr. Clatt was standing in the launch, on the alert. He gave a shout of delight as he saw Isabel, and she waved her hand. As she reached the wharf and forced her way through the Italians and Mexicans, who regarded her with no great favor, she noticed a small party of Chinese evidently in distress. The woman, magnificently arrayed, and hardly larger than a child, was huddled against the sea-wall, dumbly protesting that she could go no farther. Her face was twisted and her eyes were staring with pain and fright. A pretty child in three shirts of different colors, all silken and embroidered, was wailing in the common language of his years, and the young husband argued with his wife in vain: she made no response, but her passive resistance was as effective as if her feet had been six. She would not let her maid touch her, and her husband dared not relinquish his hold on his strong-box while surrounded by his formidable neighbors of Telegraph Hill.

Isabel, glad to be able to do something for some one, told him to hand the box to Mr. Clatt, then carry his wife on board the launch. The nurse followed with the child, while Isabel and Sugihara, having cast their own burdens

on board, and drawn their pistols, brought up in the rear.

As the launch entered the current that would carry it east of Angel Island, Isabel looked at her guests—the Chinese wife and her child lying on the cushions of the cabin, stolid once more; the big-footed maid and the husband, his strong-box between his knees, seated opposite; the Japanese, sitting cross-legged on the roof, his back to the land—no doubt to emphasize his contempt for the rabble; Mr. Clatt, shaking his fist at a group of vociferating Italians—and smiled grimly as she recalled the romantic boat party that escaped from Pompeii. She did not feel in the least romantic, but she felt something greater and deeper.

She turned her head many times to look at the wonderful spectacle of the burning city, the red curtain in the background, along whose front rushed the pillars of fire driven by the rolling masses of smoke. Where the fires on Nob Hill had burned low the flames looked like red sprouting corn. Fairmont had caught at last. It stood, a great square pile of white stone against the red background, and from its top alone poured a steady square volume of curling white smoke. The windows, and there were many hundreds of them, looked like plates of brass. The last thing she saw, as the launch shot up the bay towards San Pablo, was a wave of fire roll down Telegraph Hill, and hundreds of black pigmies fleeing before it.

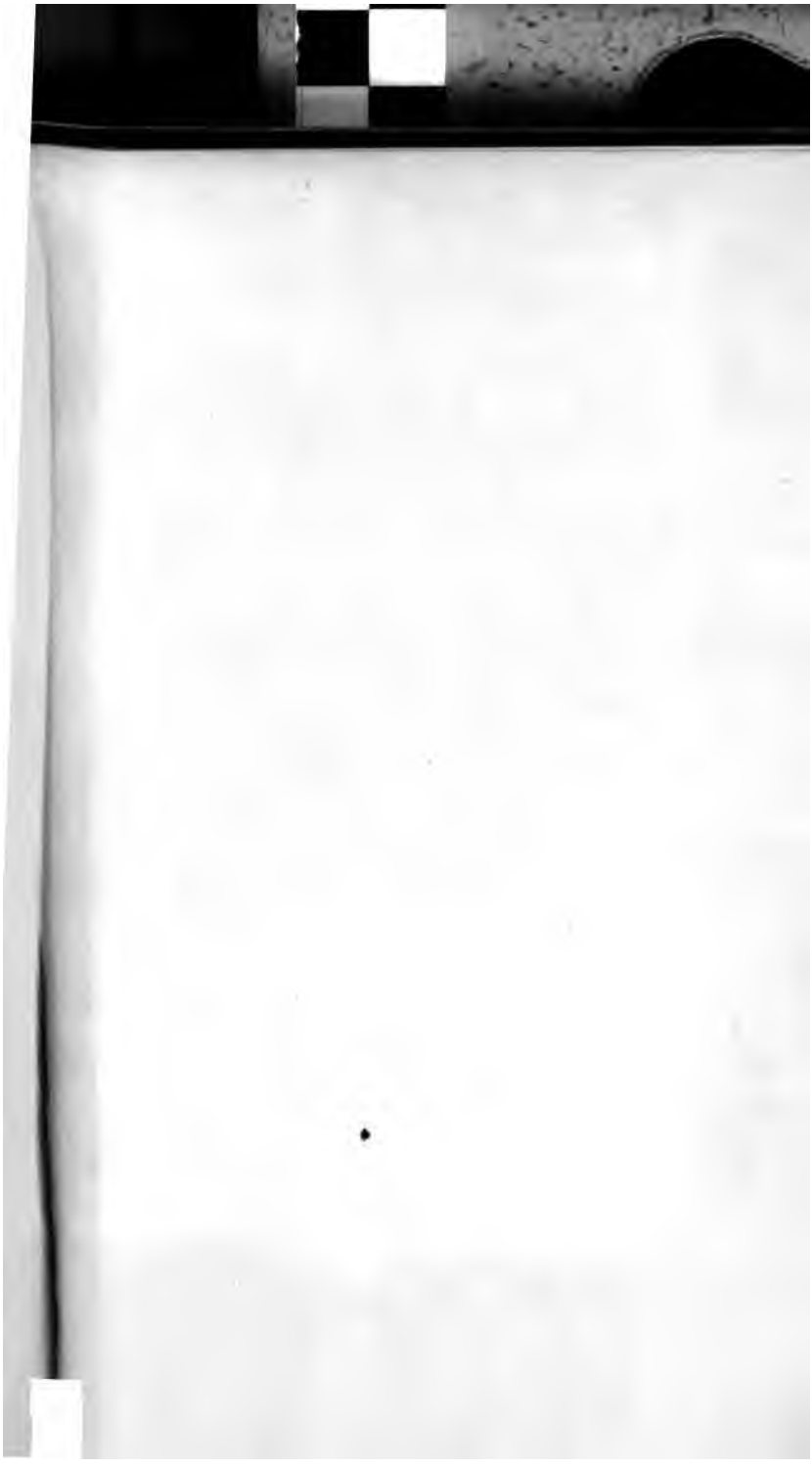
It was a beautiful evening of perfect peace when the launch entered Rosewater creek. The marsh was bathed in all the faint colors of the afterglow. The birds were singing. People were sitting under the trees in their parks



or gardens. A fisherman was sailing up to Rosewater with his catch. But for the red light in the south and the faint sound as of a besieging army, there was nothing to recall that a civilization had been arrested and a great city was burning down to its bones.

THE END













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